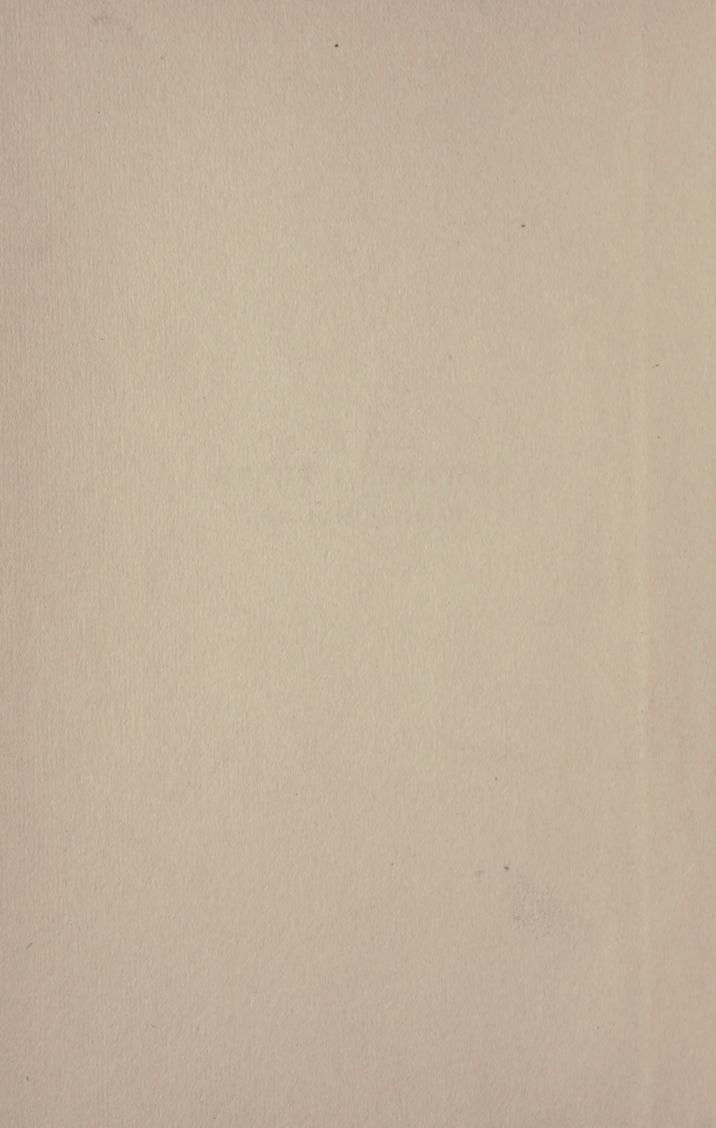
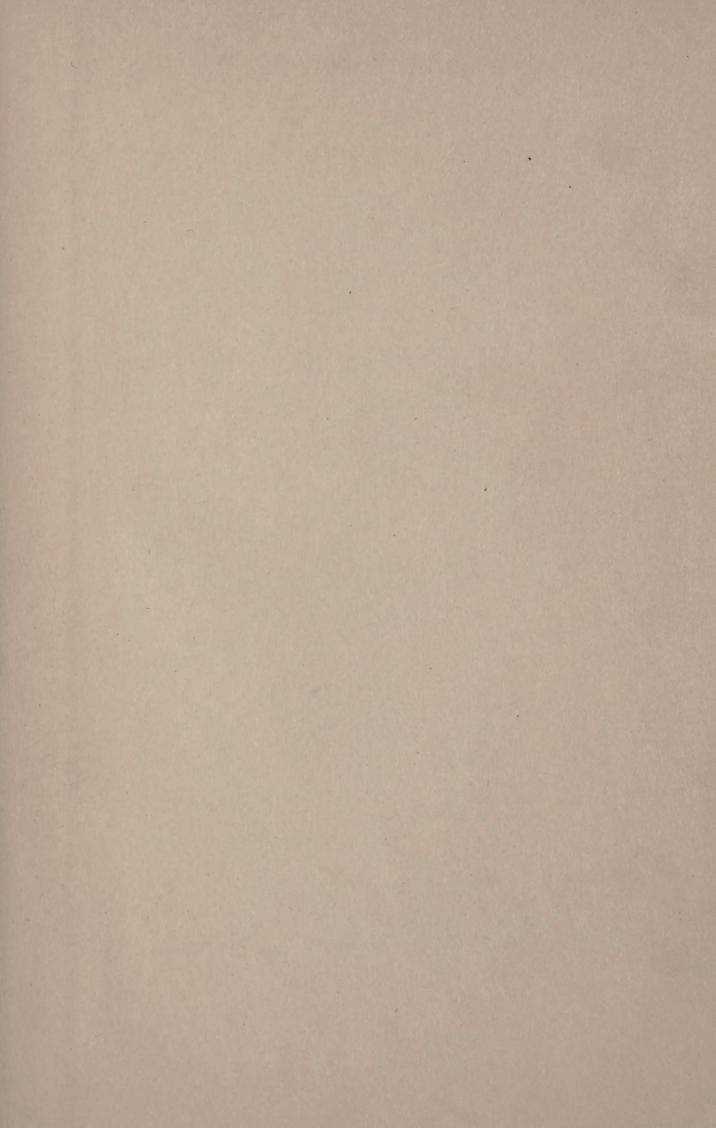


THE TOWNSEND TWINS CAMP DIRECTORS







Landing at the camp

THE TOWNSEND TWINS CAMP DIRECTORS

BY WARREN L. ELDRED

Illustrated by C. M. RELYEA



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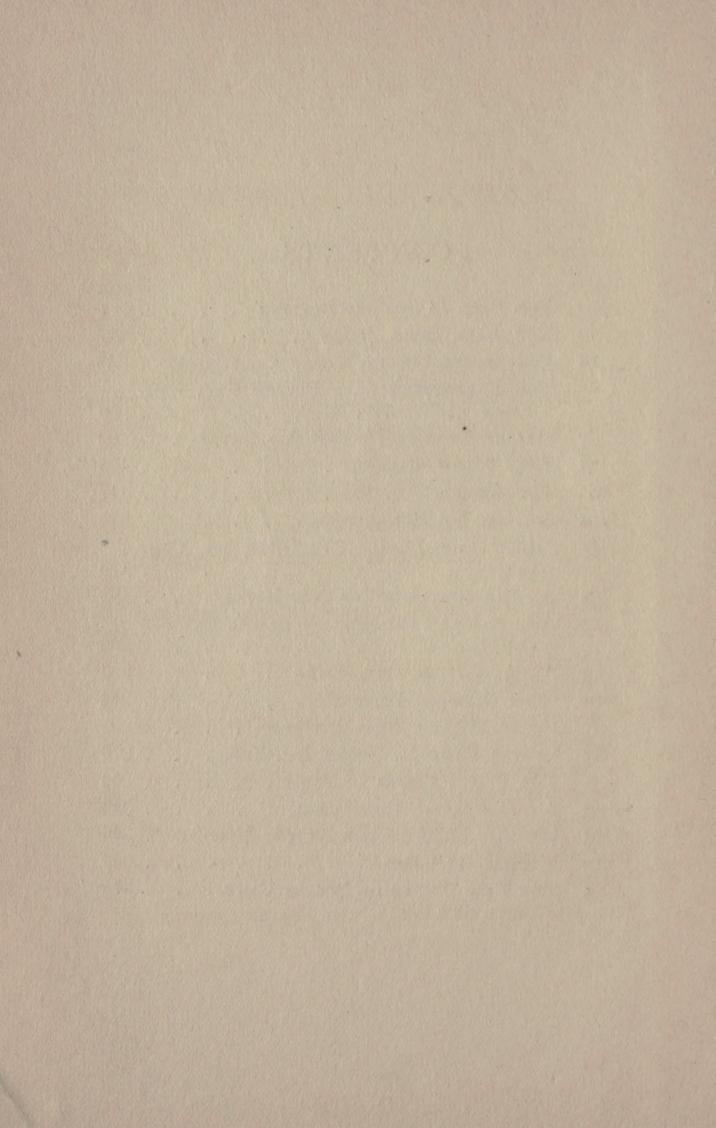
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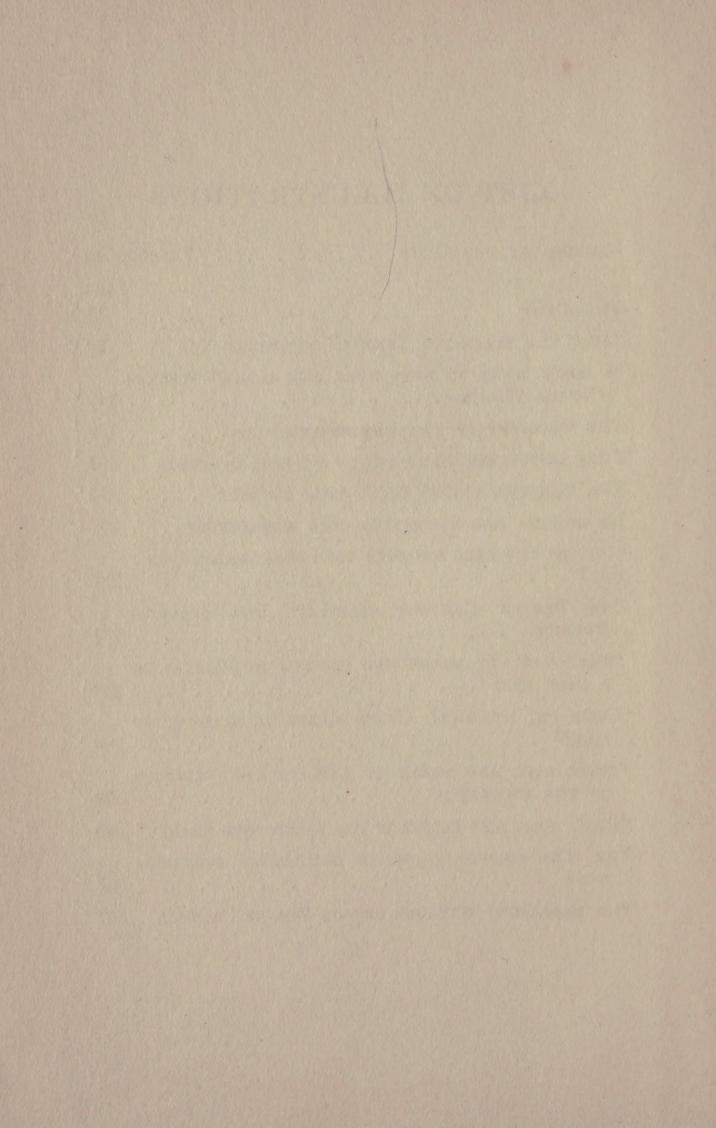
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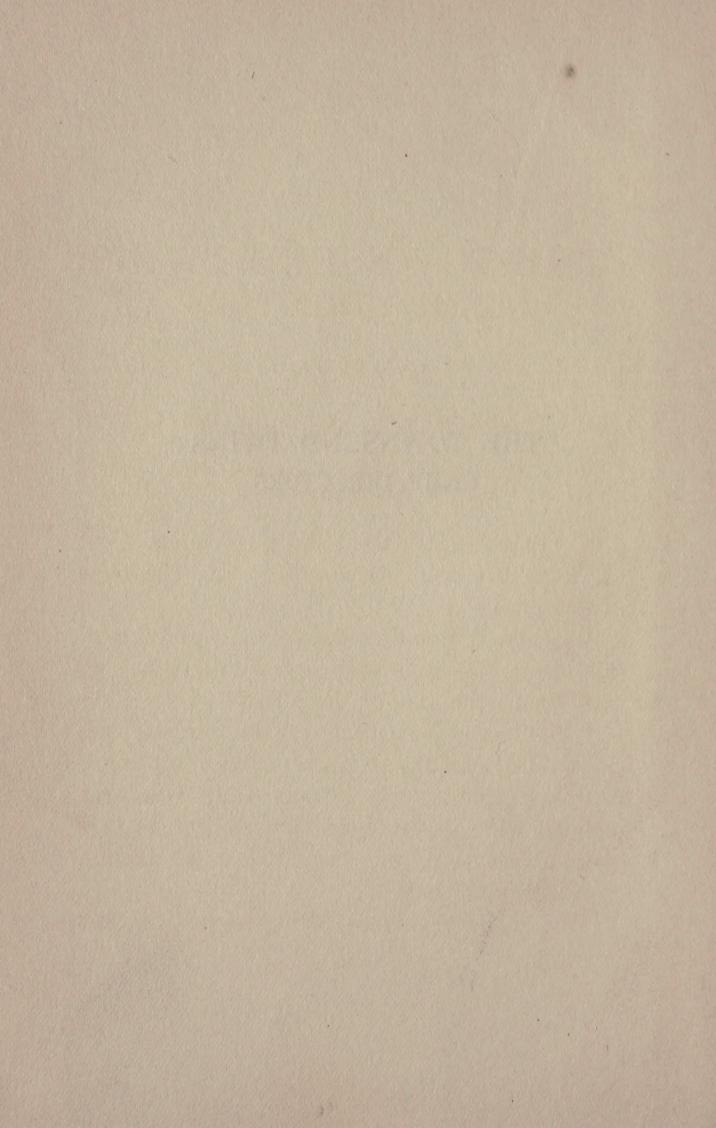


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THE TOWNSEND TWINS CAMP DIRECTORS



THE TOWNSEND TWINS CAMP DIRECTORS

CHAPTER I

THE BALL IS STARTED ROLLING

Could we but stand where Thomas stood And view the landscape o'er—

A SOFA-PILLOW, skilfully aimed, cut short the poetic effort of Thaddeus Townsend.

"I knew it would strike you sort of funny," his brother Thomas confessed with a sigh.

"What—the idea or the pillow?"

"The idea! You would n't be yourself, Tad, if you did n't make all kinds of fun of a thing."

"Why, that 's queer!" and Tad's blue eyes opened wide in pretended amazement. "If I were n't myself, who would I be? Explain yourself, kind sir."

Tom made a gesture of impatience. "Now

look here, Thaddeus Townsend, Third, you are urgently requested to cut out your nonsense for five minutes, and—"

"Wait until I set the alarm-clock, so's to know when the time is up," and Tad stepped over to the mantel and adjusted the alarm, while his brother continued his plea.

"—and listen to what I have to say. Remember, you 're not to say a single word until five minutes from now. I 'm watching the way you 're setting that thing, too."

"Yes, ma 'am—I mean, yes, sir," Tad replied meekly, at the same time correcting the adjustment of the alarm which otherwise would have sounded prematurely.

"Now I've thought this thing over, and—"
Some one tapped on the door then, and the voice of the boys' mother sounded in the hall, saying:

"Are you both here, boys? Jack Winslow has called to see you, and I have asked him to come right up. I thought we should find you here."

Tom opened the door, as he replied cordially, "All right, Mother. Thank you! Hello, Jack, come in! Hang up your chair and take a hat."

While Tom extended a welcome to their visitor, Tad rose stiffly, stood a moment in a position which military men would have called "attention," saluted, pointed gravely at the clock, then at his mouth, and held up five fingers.

Mrs. Townsend, laughing quietly at her son's elaborate pantomime, disappeared down the stairway.

Jack looked a bit puzzled for an instant, then a broad grin spread over his cheerful countenance, and he bowed low to the speechless Tad.

"Will you be good enough to furnish an explanation, Sir Thaddeus?" he said in a tone of mock seriousness.

But Tad remained silent, although his gestures became more vigorous.

"Guess what foolish notion's bitten him now, Jack," Tom exclaimed in disgust. "I asked him to dry up and listen to me for five minutes, so I suppose he thinks he can't say a word until the time 's up."

"Well, don't let me interfere, I beg of you," Jack urged. "If you want to say anything to Tad, and have him fixed so he won't talk for five minutes, it will be foolish to lose this precious opportunity. Fire away and say your

say! There, that 's poetry! Let me write it down before I forget it. I'll just borrow Tad's pen for the purpose, because he can't tell me not to. Some day, I may write a book of poems."

Jack drew out a note-book and pretended to record the choice bit of verse.

"I have a plan for next summer, Jack," Tom began, "and I may as well tell you all about it now. I spoke of the matter to Tad, and he was so overcome that he began to recite a hymn."

"It must be a swell plan, Tom, if it hit him as hard as that."

"It is! Oh, it 's a winner, all right! I want to get a crowd of our fellows together, and organize a regular camp, like those places where they charge anywhere between one hundred and two hundred dollars for the season."

Jack whistled. "I don't wonder it 's upset Tad! He 's a delicate child, a fragile—"

Br-r-r-r-r! The alarm-clock sounded the expiration of the five-minute period of silence.

"What am I?" Tad demanded, assuming a belligerent attitude and advancing toward the visitor.

"Oh, nothing, nothing! I didn't mean

you," Jack assured him, dodging behind a chair. "You are a tower of strength, noble Thaddeus! Why, the man down in Ryan's window who 's advertising that new-style exerciser is not to be mentioned in the same breath."

"'Thanks, thanks, my worthy friend," Tad responded with a low bow. "What thinkest thou of this plan of my small brother?"

"I 'thinkest' that it would be great if we could do it, but does n't it seem a little—well, a little beyond our depth?"

"That 's what I 'm afraid of, Jack," Tad replied, speaking seriously. "It would be a fine way of spending our next vacation (now only nine months off) but it must cost like sixty to run one of those affairs, and as I plunge my hand into my pocket I fail to hear the merry jingling of coins rattling together."

"Same here," Jack agreed. "Why, I've been told that some of these swell camps, with their equipment and all, are worth as much as ten thousand dollars. Some go even higher."

"Up where Simon Wagstaff went, they had a regular darky chef, and he gave them canteloup stuffed with ice cream for dessert on Sundays," Tom remarked.

"'Simple Simon' will never get over that camp," Tad chuckled. "I think he must talk about it, even in his sleep. Canteloup and ice cream! Ah, how terrible it must be to rough it that way."

Tom was afraid that conversation might drift away from the topic uppermost in his mind just then, so he returned to the subject with a good deal of earnestness. "Do you suppose these A1 camps were as they are now the first year they opened? I don't! They started small and grew. Why can't we do the same?"

"We can," Tad assured him cheerfully. "We'll start small, or not at all. There's another poem for you, Jacko! Better put it down in that wonderful note-book of yours."

"I want to make a regular business of it, you know," Tom explained. "This is the idea! Get ten fellows together, and run the camp for the benefit of this crowd the first summer. We'll be the officers of the corporation, the board of directors, and all that sort of thing. The stuff will belong to us. After that, if we have the cash, we can get more fellows in, and try to make some money."

Tad sighed and shook his head solemnly.

"Ah, Tommy, Tommy!" he exclaimed sorrowfully. "Have you forgotten what the newspapers have been saying about the Sherman Act? If you go to work and organize a Camp Trust, you 'll be hauled up before the courts for being a—a—what is it they call 'em? Oh, yes! a combination in restraint of trade. Then we 'll have to come around and bail you out with a bailing can."

"Tom shows his business training, all right," laughed Jack. "Prof' Walker would be proud of him."

The three boys were students in the commercial department of one of the New York City high schools. Their daily round of classroom and lecture-hall periods had made them familiar with the simpler forms of bookkeeping, and with such matters as partnership settlements and the incorporation of a business. Tom's active mind had developed the instruction thus received to a point where it could be used for his personal advantage and for the benefit of his friends.

"It is n't as if we had to begin 'way back at the beginning," Tom went on to explain.

"If you don't begin at the beginning, then

what do you call the place where you begin?"
Tad demanded. "When is a beginning not a beginning?"

"You 'll get your brain snarled up into terrible kinks if you overwork it that way," Tom observed severely, as he glared at the offender. "You see, Jack, we have a real plan to work on. There's a camp for sale up on Lake Champlain, and from all I hear, it's a corker."

"What do you hear?" Jack inquired with eager interest. "Don't pay any attention to Tad. He's naughty! Tell me all about it. I'm a good little boy. I won't butt in till you get past all the commas and things and come to the last period."

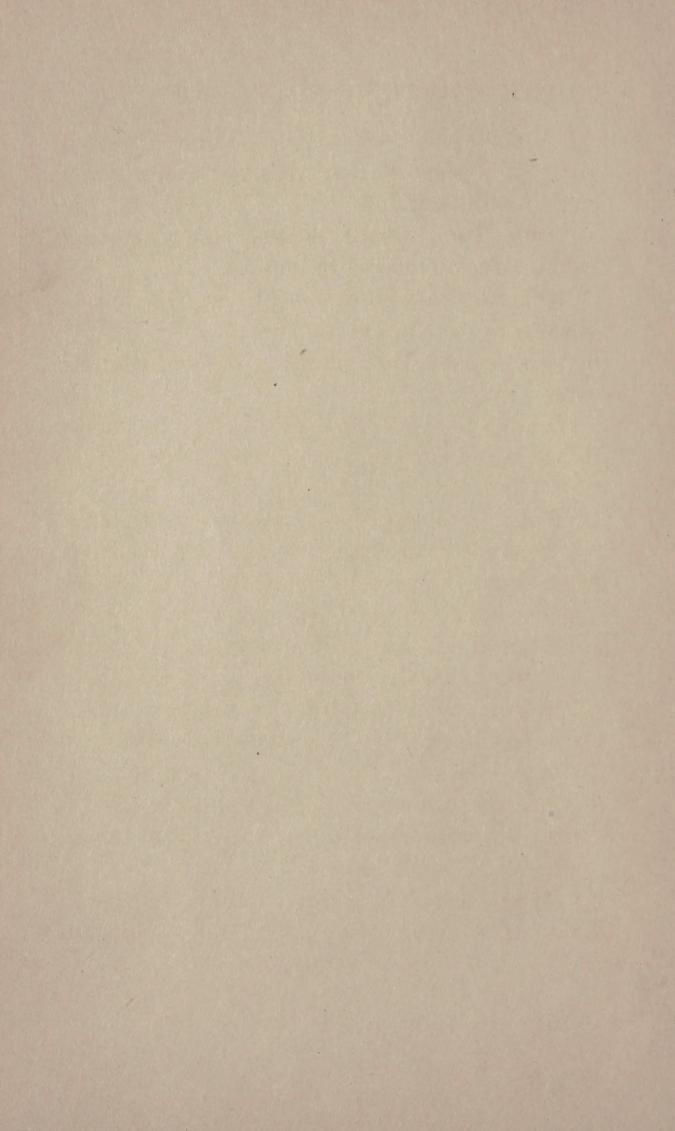
"I've seen a picture of the place, Jack, and it's great! A fine, sandy beach with woods back of it; a field where you can play baseball, a bungalow, an ice-house, and a sort of cottage—how's that for a camp site?"

"Sounds like a winner, Tom. Do you suppose it is at all like the picture?"

"Oh, yes! It's a straight proposition, Jack. I know the man who owns it. He wants to sell the place for twenty-five hundred dollars."

Jack gasped and pretended to feel faint.

The camp



"A mere trifle, of course," Tad commented airily. "I suggest that we order a dozen and write for discounts."

"But, Tom, where is the money coming from?" Jack managed to inquire.

"Oh, why we don't have to buy the place. We can rent it for the summer."

"I hope rents climb down as the temperature climbs up."

"Not so you could notice it, Jack! He wants two hundred for the season, unfurnished."

"Dollars?"

"Sure! Did you think I meant cats?"

"It might as well be two thousand, Tommy. I can shut my eyes and imagine that I have as much as that right in my pocket, but when I open 'em again—why I can't imagine beyond ten cents. I need a tonic for my imagination."

"The rent does n't strike you as being at all high, does it, Jack?" Tad asked shrewdly.

"Why, it's awful!" Jack declared. "I don't know much about such things, but I should think we ought to get a furnished camp, if we pay as much as that."

"So we ought," Tom agreed, "and we would, too, if we all were grown up. I did n't think it

was square to keep anything from Mr. Raymond—he's the man who owns the place—when I wrote to him, so he knows that it's a party of fellows who want to use his camp. Probably he has put the rent high, thinking that it will scare us away. Anyhow, he's not very keen about renting. He wants to sell the place, and I understand that he moved all the furniture out last fall."

"If it 's worth anything he 'd better not leave it there for our crowd to use," Tad declared.

"Nobody would be exactly enthusiastic over the idea of letting a bunch of fellows take possession of a furnished camp," Tom went on. "I can see how Mr. Raymond feels about it, but if we get ten of our fellows together—picked men, remember—I think we can raise the money. This is only the end of September, you know. Look at the oceans of time we have."

Tad drew out his note-book and picked up his fountain-pen.

"Mr. Winslow," he began in a businesslike tone, "shall I have the great honor of incorporating you into the Thomas Townsend Camp Trust? (I'm afraid we'll need a lot of trust before we get through.)"

"Sure! Put me down," Jack responded good-naturedly, amused at the idea. "I suppose the first ones to enter will be the officers of the Trust and the largest stockholders."

Tad nodded. "My enterprising brother will be president. You can be vice-president, secretary, treasurer, general manager, superintendent, or chairman of the board of directors. I'm to be chief of the staff of office boys, because I want to wear a uniform with a double row of brass buttons on the front. The unfortunate dub who's the last to be admitted to the Trust is to be chief cook. This great corporation will be composed of nine officers and one member."

"I'll be the member," Jack volunteered.
"I'm so modest that the shrinking violet is bold when compared with me."

There was a pause while Tad made some elaborate flourishes which would have endangered the near-by territory if there had been much ink in his pen. Then Jack remarked suddenly:

"Well, here! I have n't told you what I came to see you about in particular. This Camp Trust almost made me forget it. Who

are you going to root for as president of the athletic association?"

The twins exchanged glances which seemed to suggest information not yet made public. Finally, Tad spoke.

"'Simple Simon' Wagstaff has n't the ghost of a chance. He puts on too many airs. We 'd be for Bert Halsey, only—er—well, the fact is, Jack, Bert did n't seem quite on the level in the exams last June."

Jack's eyes opened wide in undisguised amazement. "I would n't have thought that of Bert!" he exclaimed.

Tom nodded. "It's an awful shame," he said regretfully, "but we can't doubt it. After the physiology exam, we walked out of the schoolyard together, and Bert reached up to swing on that iron bar across the gate—the fellows often do that, you know. We could n't help noticing that his cuffs were covered with notes in shorthand. We saw enough of 'em to know that they had something to do with physiology. We 've never said a word about it to any one outside until now, and we 'd rather you would keep it quiet, Jack. That 's the reason why we 'd be sorry to vote for Halsey."

CHAPTER II

THE BALL STILL ROLLS

SINCE the time when they had been permitted to leave the house without constant parental surveillance, the Townsend twins had been leaders in every boyish activity that made life interesting in the neighborhood. Neither of them, perhaps, could have occupied a position of leadership if deserted by the other, but each seemed able to supply what the other lacked, and their fellowship was so intimate that they formed the strongest and closest sort of partnership.

Thaddeus Townsend, named for his father and paternal grandfather, was an easy-going, good-natured boy; fond of fun, and of physical rather than scholastic exercise. He was shorter than his brother and heavier. The ruddy glow of health in his round, rosy cheeks, and the sparkle of his clear blue eyes bore evidence to a clean, wholesome, robust physique.

His brother Thomas was taller than the average boy of his years, and slender without being thin. He possessed a quick, active mind, a tremendous fund of nervous energy, considerable physical strength, and more than a little strength of character. Apparently, nothing gave him keener delight than to lay ambitious plans for the future, and then to bend all his energies toward the accomplishment of his purposes.

Tad never failed to ridicule these plans of his enterprising brother, or to poke all manner of good-humored fun at his efforts. Nevertheless, he always worked loyally and diligently to make these same efforts successful, so his merry raillery never caused Tom much real distress. Indeed, not infrequently the humorous comments carried with them so much sturdy common sense that the attention of the impulsive maker of plans was drawn to some weak link in his chain of arrangements. Then a revision was made, thus assuring larger and more permanent success.

The boys always had lived in a certain small two-story-and-basement house, located in one of the sections of New York City that had re-

THE BALL STILL ROLLS

sisted the invasion of commerce until recent aggressive tactics had carried the bold invaders within the outer bulwarks of the neighborhood. Together they had passed through the different grades of the nearest grammar school, and now were enrolled in one of the great high schools of the city, where upward of fifteen hundred boys were receiving instruction and training calculated to make them capable and competent in commercial life.

The twins were several months past their fifteenth birthday, and on the mild September afternoon when Jack Winslow called, he found them sitting in the square room which they had shared since infancy. The two windows commanded a superb view of a row of high, brick apartment-houses, the rear of each festooned with fire-escapes. A large warehouse was halfway up the block, and a garage, reeking with odors of gasoline, stood nearer—a dismal commentary upon the fact that real estate in New York City must be made to yield the utmost income, even though residences are jostled on either side by buildings used for commercial purposes. This invasion of the peace and quiet of the neighborhood, as has been hinted,

2 19

had occurred during the recent past, and was viewed with no little alarm and resentment by the citizens. It suggested a future not pleasant to contemplate.

The room of the twins and its environment are worthy of note, because here it was destined that the headquarters of the Camp Trust should be located.

"Have you said anything to Bert about it?"

Jack asked, after a long pause which followed

Tom's explanation.

Tad shook his head.

"No, we have n't, Jack. He 's never seemed bothered about it, either. He must have known that we saw his cuffs with the notes on 'em, yet he didn't attempt to conceal anything. In fact, to see him you would have thought that it was just the proper thing to wear cuffs decorated with a lot of physiology notes in shorthand."

Jack puzzled over the matter a minute, then suggested, "Maybe he thought that if he acted as if nothing special was doing, you would n't suspect anything. It took nerve to follow a program like that, and he must have kept a pretty good grip on himself."

THE BALL STILL ROLLS

"I never could feel the same toward a fellow after I'd caught him in any underhanded work," Tom declared. "Halsey is very pleasant, though, and he 's popular among the fellows. I almost wish that I did n't know this thing about him, because it makes me feel disgusted when I think of him, and yet I can't explain my reason to the other fellows."

"There are n't many fellows in the school who 'd have kept a secret like that from leaking," Jack said in a tone which expressed wonder and admiration. "Why not show him up?"

"No!" Tom shook his head in emphatic dissent. "It may all be true, Jack. Halsey may have cribbed the whole exam from those notes, but I'll never say a word to any one that'll queer him with the fellows. Of course, we can trust you to keep still. That's the reason we told you why we didn't feel like voting for Halsey."

"But—but—he's sailing under false colors!" Jack protested. "You have a clear case, it seems to me. It's your duty to the class and to the whole school to expose a fellow who'd do such a thing. Suppose he's elected—it looks

as if he would be—and then does some sneaking thing. Think of the disgrace to the school."

"Yes, we have thought of it, Jack," Tad assured him. "We 've talked it all over, Tom and I, and we don't feel like starting any report that would always follow Halsey, and might spoil his whole future life. Suppose he could clear himself, and prove that there was nothing wrong in having the notes at that time. How would we feel?"

"I don't see how he can do that-honestly."

"Neither do I, but there 's no evidence, Jack.
Just our word against his."

"But there are two of you."

"Might as well be one. If I said the moon was made of green cheese, Tom would declare that he had thought so ever since his first glimpse of it. We always stick up for each other, and always have—always will, I hope. Every one who's had any dealings with us knows that.

"Then, another thing! The fellows 'll wonder why we did n't say something about this before. Keeping it till now and springing it at this time looks like a campaign trick."

"Hm-m! Well, so be it," Jack assented, not

altogether convinced that the twins were following the wisest course. "I must run along. I just dropped in for a few minutes and I 've been here more 'n an hour."

The boys escorted him to the door, then returned to their room.

"Do you really think that camp plan will work, Tad?" Tom asked, a bit anxiously, plunging his hands into his trousers' pockets and staring absent-mindedly out of the window.

Tad seated himself beside their study table, resting his elbows upon it and his head on his hands.

"I'm not so sure of the plan working, Tommy, but I rather think you 'll work if you undertake to put anything like that through. It 's a good-sized job that you 're tackling.'

"That does n't scare me, Tad. I'm willing to work, but if I start it, I'd hate to see the thing fall through."

His brother nodded sympathetically and remained silent.

"I just got the letter this afternoon. It was waiting for me when I came in from school. I don't believe I 've even showed you the pictures of the place, have I?"

Tad sighed and assumed the air of a martyr, as he replied, "Oh, no! I never see anything. I meek and good-natured, so I always get the leavings. Here you've been carrying this camp plan around under your curly locks, which, by the way, would be improved if you used a comb to smooth them down and quit running your fingers through 'em, and I 'm not told anything about the scheme until you get ready to incorporate and need capital. Then you come around tempting me. This time, you are foiled! Ha! I will have my revenge! Not a cent of my money shall swell your hoard until day after to-morrow. I get my allowance then."

"You're a poor, neglected child," Tom responded. "I kept still about this camp plan until I had something definite to tell you. One of the people in the room here—and it is n't I—is fond of speaking cruelly of what he calls 'half-baked' schemes which the other sometimes mentions to him."

Tad threw up his hands. "I plead guilty, and throw myself upon the mercy of the Court!" he exclaimed.

"Well, it 's true, Tad, that sometimes I get

an idea into my head, and go rushing off without looking into the matter as I should," Tom admitted, "but this time, I wanted to surprise you."

"You certainly have!" his brother declared.

"I saw the advertisement in the paper about a week ago, and I took special interest in it because we met Mr. Raymond at Lake George last summer, and it was he who was trying to sell his camp."

"That 's so! I remember him, now that you speak of the time we met him."

"Well, I sat right down and wrote to Mr. Raymond, telling him what I was thinking of, and his answer has just come. He'd rather sell than rent, but if the property is on his hands next summer, he'll let us use it for two hundred dollars."

"I should think he might. He won't lose any money on the deal, at that figure."

"Oh, but it 's a swell place, Tad! Just look at the pictures. Now, here 's one taken from the lake—"

Tom laid a picture before his brother, who carried it nearer the window to get a stronger light. Beyond the rippling waters of the lake,

a sandy beach extended across the small kodak picture. Beyond this, the trees stood out so sharply and distinctly that it was almost possible to imagine a slight rustling of the leaves in the light breeze that gently forced the little wavelets up on the sand. A low, homelike-appearing bungalow was partly visible through the trees, and a plain, small building stood farther back among the shadows. A wharf, not large but apparently substantial, extended out some twelve or fifteen feet into the lake, and beyond it, at the extreme end of the picture, a high, wooded point thrust itself out from the shore.

"Here's a nearer view of the bungalow," Tom went on, "and here's the clearing where we could make an athletic field, and that picture shows the spring. They say it's a dandy spring with fine, clear, cool water."

"Dry up every summer?"

"Why no-it never dries up!"

"Neither do you!"

"Toot-toot! And here's the road leading back from the camp to the main road."

Tad was such a real boy that he could not help catching some of his brother's enthusiasm as he

looked at the pictures and imagined what a delightful summer might be spent in such a spot. The bungalow was about forty feet wide, and, judging from the pictures, a little more than half as deep. A wide piazza extended across the front of this building, and was so built that from it one might catch the best views obtainable of the beautiful lake and the majestic splendor of the distant Adirondacks.

The "athletic-field-to-be" was cleared of trees, but that was about all that could be said in its favor. It was rough, uneven, and covered with a rank growth of tall grass and weeds.

"Just the place for tennis," murmured Tad.
"It looks like a jungle."

"Oh, just let ten fellows wade into that with scythes and spades. We'd soon have a baseball diamond, a tennis court, and room enough left for basketball, most likely."

"Hm-m! If you let ten fellows loose in there with scythes, you 'll have a lot of surgical cases on your hands. You 'd better use just one fellow and one scythe. Let him keep a stone wall between himself and his trusty blade, then he won't come to grief."

"Well, there's lots of time. We're not there yet."

"That's so! I'm glad you reminded me of it. Why don't you lay out a golf course on your grassy glade?"

"We might," Tom responded. "Once we get started, there's no telling how we'll develop."

The spring looked so cool and refreshing that Tad declared the sight of it made him thirsty. The camera had almost caught the sparkle of the water as it bubbled up through the opening in the rocks, and a thick screen of bushes and small trees protected it from the sun.

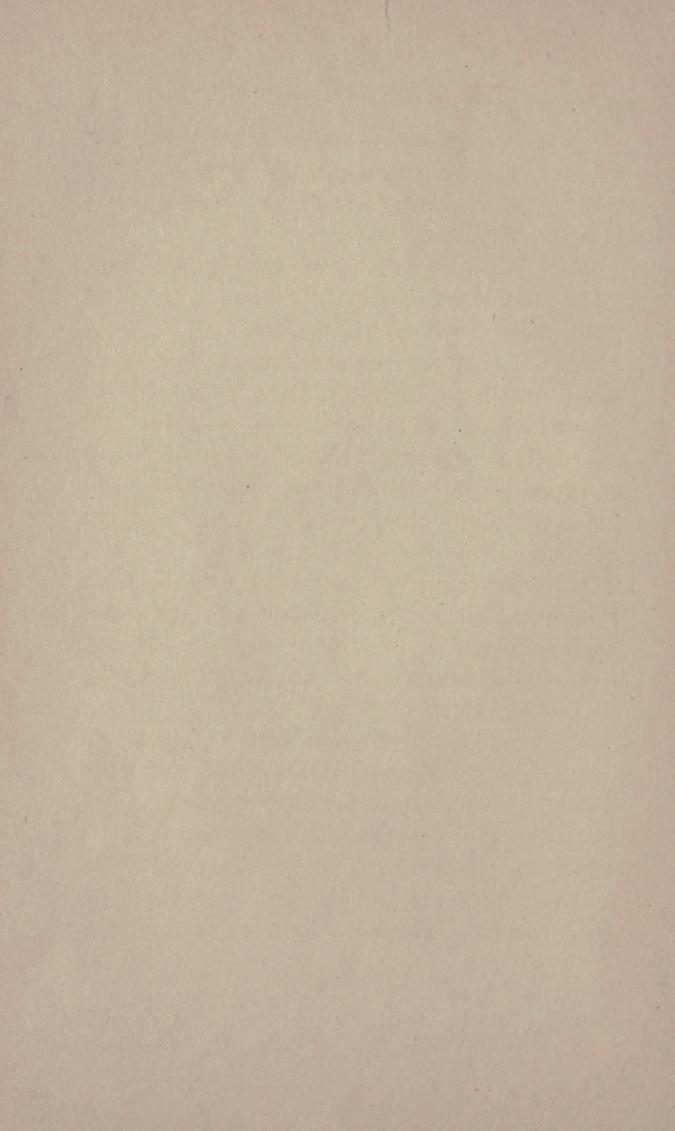
"We could have the water piped into the bungalow," Tom suggested. "It is n't very far."

"Oh, yes!" his brother agreed, "and we could make a fountain right down on the shore. Just think how pretty it would look from the lake."

The last picture in the collection showed a narrow, shady road, traveled very infrequently. One might imagine the chirping of birds in the trees and the drowsy hum of bees flying hither and thither among the wild flowers.



"Just the place for tennis," murmured Tad



"It's a tip-top place, Tom!" cried his brother, returning the pictures with a happy sigh. "A regular top-notcher! Let's start to-morrow."

"We 'll have to talk it over here at home, first thing," Tom announced. "I don't know what the folks will say about the idea."

"If we went to a regular camp, it would cost close on to five hundred dollars for the two of us, including railroad fares, side trips, and everything. A boarding-house would be nearly as expensive, because Mother would n't want to go so far that Father could n't commute every day, and board comes high near the city. That 's too much to spend. I don't believe Father could stand it, especially just now when business is rather quiet."

Tom nodded, but made no further response, so Tad continued,

"We might go off on a little trip for two weeks, like we did last summer, and spend the rest of the vacation in town, or we could go out to the farm and stay with Aunt Mary—"

"We don't want to go to Aunt Mary's," Tom hastily interposed. "Not but what she'd be glad to see us, and would give us the best she

has, but it 's way out in the wilderness and you know by sad experience that there 's absolutely nothing to do after you get settled. As for staying home eight weeks in the heat and going away for two, why, that 's not to be thought of if we can spend the whole vacation in camp."

"How much will it cost, Tom? Have you figured it out at all?"

"Not yet! Got a piece of paper? Now, let's see! Rent, two hundred dollars, ten fellows, twenty dollars apiece. Food and supplies, about five hundred dollars, fifty dollars for each fellow. Carfare, there and back, well—say ten dollars. That ought to cover it. Twenty, fifty, and ten—eighty dollars for each one, figuring closely and not making allowances for extras."

"Do you think you can get ten fellows to go into this scheme? We'll have to be careful what kind we take—no 'grouches,' no quitters, no kickers, and no fellow with anything that looks like a yellow streak in him."

"There are n't more than ten like that in the whole city, are there? I mean eight besides us, of course."

"Oh, sure! Why, there 's Jack Winslow, Ed

Sherman, and 'Lefty' Beckley. They 're just the right kind to begin with. We can find ten, all right; don't worry about that part of it."

"There's another important thing that we have n't talked about yet. Who's going to run the camp? Father won't let us stir a step unless we have some man to look after us."

"That's right! I never thought of that.
Wow! Who under the sun can we get?"

"Bert Halsey has a brother who was a camp leader somewhere last summer. He's studying medicine, and I should think he'd be just about right. We would n't need a doctor in camp if we had him, and his experience with a bunch of fellows at camp would make him able to run this affair of ours without much trouble, it seems to me."

"Well, if we thought of asking him, we'd have to include Bert in the party. Do we want him?"

"That 's so. We 're sort of up against it there, sure enough! Oh, well! Maybe we can get some one else, though it is n't going to be easy to find a man who 'll be so killing fond of our society that he 'll jump at the chance of spending the summer with us. We 'll keep our

fingers crossed, all the same, and wish good things for all we 're worth.''

"We'll talk it over with Father to-night. He may know of some one."

"He may—but then, again, he may not! That's more likely."

From the floor below, a musical bell chimed—one, two, three, four, five.

"Five o'clock and all 's well!" cried Tom.
"If we 're going to discuss this camp after supper, it strikes me that it might not be a bad idea to do some studying now. How about it?"

Tad sighed gloomily, and picked up a German grammar. Except for the noisy ticking of the alarm-clock, and an occasional question or exclamation, there was little to disturb the peace and calm until the dinner-bell rang, shortly before seven.

When Tom's mind was possessed by one of his ambitious plans, it was not to be expected that he would long remain silent, when an opportunity to take a forward step presented itself. Hence, Mr. and Mrs. Townsend were treated to an enthusiastic report of the camp proposition before the evening meal had reached its conclusion.

They were so accustomed to hearing one or another of Tom's hopeful dreams that nothing of this sort gave them much concern. The idea seemed good to Mr. Townsend, and he encouraged the boys to go on with their planning. To be sure, Mrs. Townsend expressed some anxiety for the safety of the twins, and professed a belief that they surely would fall into harm or danger or mischief, so far from parental guidance and oversight, but the twins knew that she spoke in this manner with a desire to remind them of the necessity of care and thought, rather than on account of any real opposition to their plan.

"Suppose you get out the atlas, Tom, and show us just where this place is," Mr. Townsend suggested, as they rose from the table.

The family gathered around the long, low table in the library. (The Townsends were old-fashioned enough to call it the "sitting-room.") The lamp cast a mellow, cheerful light about the room, and the whole atmosphere of the place was so pleasant and homelike that one might be inclined to wonder why two boys should wish to exchange this comfort for "a lodge in some vast wilderness."

Tom hunted up the map of Lake Champlain in the big atlas, and ran his finger slowly down the eastern shore until it came to Beaver Creek.

"It's right in there, somewhere," he reported. "The railroad runs through here, but the camp is a long way from the nearest station. The best way to get there is on one of the lake steamboats. A little launch will take you over to the camp landing from Westport or Essex."

"A good, healthful location," Mr. Townsend commented. "You have the Adirondacks on the west, and the Green Mountains on the east. A beautiful spot for a camp, to be sure, though I suppose you re not thinking of going away just to admire the scenery."

"Is n't there a large Y. M. C. A. camp up in that section?" Mrs. Townsend inquired.

"Camp Dudley's up that way," Tad made answer. "That's the big New York State camp. It's on the opposite side of the lake, though, and farther down."

"That camp started small," Tom excitedly reminded them. "They had only seven fellows the first year, and just see what it is to-day.

Nobody can tell what our camp will be in a few years."

Mr. Townsend laughed merrily. "Nothing like planning for big things, Tom," he remarked approvingly. "Hitch your wagon to a star." You may never get all you hope for, but you 'll accomplish more than if you never dared to risk anything for fear of possible failure."

"How did you discover this camp site?" Mrs. Townsend wanted to know.

"Well, it came about in this way," Tom explained. "There's a fellow in school named Simon Wagstaff. The fellows call him 'Simple Simon' because he puts on so many airs that he 's silly. He went to one of those bang-up camps last summer, one where it costs a pile for the season. It made him more stuck-up than he was before, and that 's saying a good deal. Ever since school opened, he 's been blowing about that wonderful camp—what they did, and what the director said, and what the doctor said, and what the cook said, and what the cat thought about it all.

"At first, it struck me as funny, but it got tiresome after a while. Then, all at once, I be-

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gan to think how much fun it would be to get up a party of fellows and spend the season at one of these camps. Most of 'em charge like sixty, and we could n't afford it—our crowd. Then I wondered why we could n't have one of our own, and make a regular business of running a camp for fellows who might like to come.

"That 's what I want to do up there on Lake Champlain. Of course, the first year will be an experiment, and the fellows who go into it will be partners in the business. Another year, we can take more fellows, charge them enough to give us a little profit, and use that money to build up the camp and make improvements.

"Well, I got off the subject, didn't I? Let's see, where was I? Oh, yes—why, after I'd thought of this scheme, I began to look at the advertisements in the newspapers. One day, I found that a man up in Burlington was offering a camp for sale or to let. I wrote to him, and his answer came to-day. It turned out to be that real-estate man who was stopping at the little hotel on Lake George where we stayed over Sunday last summer. Raymond is his name. I guess you remember him."

"Oh, yes!" Mr. Townsend responded, taking

the letter and pictures which Tom handed him. "I have very pleasant memories of Mr. Raymond."

"I kept this thing a secret, even from Tad,"
Tom observed with a chuckle of satisfaction.
"I just told him to-day about what I want to do."

"It is very wrong to boast of one's virtues," Tad remarked with withering scorn. "I never do it."

But his brother received the modest statement with derision.

The pictures were duly examined and admired, and the parents of the twins seemed to catch some of the boys' enthusiasm as they talked together of the possibilities of health-giving, wholesome living out-of-doors which such a delightful place afforded.

"Of course, you will need some older friend to manage the camp," Mr. Townsend said finally, "but this can be arranged without much effort, I think. There are a number of trained camp leaders who will be seeking engagements next spring, and this plan is so attractive in many ways that I should n't wonder if one of these young men would be glad of the opportu-

nity to take hold of such a camp and develop it."

"If you do go up there to start a camp next summer, boys, I wish you 'd take your cousin Will Ainsworth with you," Mrs. Townsend ventured somewhat uncertainly. "I think it would be the making of him."

"Cousin Willie!" gasped Tom, and the twins looked at each other in undisguised alarm and dismay. "Perish the thought!"

CHAPTER III

CONCERNING COUSIN WILLIE AND OTHERS

"WHY, Mother!" Tad exclaimed, striving to express himself politely, yet frankly. "The fellows would make all kinds of fun of Willie. Of course, we'd try to be nice to him, but he's so—er—so different from the others! Why, if he saw a spider, a great, big, fat, crawly, fuzzy-wuzzy spider, with popeyes—"Mrs. Townsend began to look apprehensive—"I believe he'd yell."

"You have wonderful powers of description, Tad. I can almost feel a spider crawling on me now."

"Let me knock off the imaginary creature," Tad begged, making frantic efforts to discover the offender. "But, really, Mother, you know what a perfect baby Willie is. More than that, he's a spoiled baby. Why, I can hear the fel-

lows calling him Will 'e Bite if we took him up there with us."

"He is spoiled, Tad," Mrs. Townsend admitted, "and not as manly and courageous as—as my boys are, but he is younger than you, and sometimes, as I have watched him, it has seemed to me that some experience which would compel him to depend upon his own resources would make a different boy of Will. I feel anxious about him, boys, because he is the only boy in my family, you know, except a certain pair not far away. If he should grow up to be a weak, effeminate man, it would be a great disappointment to all of us."

"Well, would he want to go, Mother?" Tom asked, as Mrs. Townsend paused, and his tone indicated quite plainly that he hoped such a desire might be far from his cousin's thoughts. "I should think he 'd be afraid of that rough sort of life. He might spot his clothes, or get his hands dirty, or be obliged to do what he did n't want to. A fellow has to take what 's coming to him in camp, and if he kicks, he soon finds that he 's teased worse than ever."

"Will wanted to go to some camp this last summer," was the reply, "but said nothing

about it until the plans of the family were made. Then, too, his mother could not bear the thought of sending him among strangers. If you have your camp next summer, as you are planning it, I think he will want to be with you, and it will be a great relief to his mother to know that he is with his own cousins."

Mr. Townsend took advantage of this three-cornered discussion, and picked up the evening paper. It was evident, however, that the news was not holding his entire attention, for a subdued chuckle from behind the outspread pages betrayed his interest in the cause of Cousin Willie.

"Hm-m-m!" Tad murmured, admitting the truth of all that had been said, but still reserving certain grave doubts of his own. "Would the kid be willing to do what he was told, after he got there? We could n't begin to humor him the way they do at home, and it seems to me that he would n't be happy unless he could have his own way. I believe he 'd want to run back to mama the first night. A fellow who needs a nurse is awfully out of place at a camp."

Mrs. Townsend smiled a little. "If he

should go, Tad, of course he would be obliged to obey all the rules that the campers might make. That is the sort of discipline Will needs. He might not enjoy it, but I believe his pride would keep him from complaining."

"We'll talk it over with the fellows, Mother," Tom promised, striving to end the matter in a diplomatic way. "If they're willing to take Willie, I suppose he can tag on."

"Of course, I should n't want Will to be a burden to you, or in any way spoil the pleasure of this outing, either for yourselves or your friends," Mrs. Townsend quietly remarked. "I cannot hope that you will take quite the same view of this matter that I do.

"It seems to me that the way to get the most happiness out of any form of recreation is to help some one else at the same time. Perhaps there is not as much selfish pleasure in this kind of fun, but I have found that it brings more happiness and a sort of contented, satisfied feeling that does not soon pass away.

"Take this matter that we are discussing, for instance. If you boys go off with your friends to camp, you will have a good time, no doubt, and will come back to us larger,

stronger, and better able to do the work that future months may bring. This is worth while, and I ought not to call this manner of spending a vacation a selfish one.

"Yet, it seems to me that I should feel better satisfied with my vacation if I came back to the city knowing that I had helped a boy to become manly and self-reliant.

"Well, well! what a long sermon I've preached! I won't say any more about this, boys, because I know that I can trust you to do what is right and fair to everybody interested in the plan."

Conversation was turned into other channels after a time, and in half an hour the boys went upstairs to spend a little more time on the lessons for the next day.

"If ever I need anybody to plead for me, I'll send for Mother," Tad declared. "She's great at making you want to do the things you did n't want to do before she tackled you."

"Surest thing you know! I suppose we'll have to take the kid, but if he gets to cutting up any monkey-shines—" Tom stopped suddenly and made a gesture, which, had he seen it, would surely have struck terror into the heart

of the youthful William Langley Ainsworth, Jr.

The annual meeting of the Athletic Association in the school attended by the twins was held in October. As the president expected to graduate in February, it was necessary to elect his successor at the approaching meeting. Several candidates had been mentioned, and campaigning was actively in progress during these days preceding the election.

The two candidates most prominent in the field were Gilbert Halsey and Simon Wagstaff, both in the first half of the second year of their courses, and classmates of the twins.

Simon Wagstaff represented the sporting element in the school. His family possessed considerable wealth, suddenly though honestly acquired, and Simon cultivated all the airs and graces of what he would have termed "a society man." The more solid and sensible of the students despised him and ridiculed his affected mannerisms, but he had a loyal following, nevertheless, among those who were like himself or who desired to be.

Gilbert Halsey was captain of the track team,

and substitute tackle on the 'varsity eleven, with a bright prospect of being used regularly if a certain youth failed to show decided improvement in the near future. He was a conscientious worker, and usually an unselfish, happy-go-lucky fellow. He had a violent temper, however, and when he lost his self-control, he sometimes lost friends at the same time. His election was confidently predicted by many students who remained loyal to him, in spite of his infirmities of temper.

The morning after the Thomas Townsend Camp Trust started merrily upon its career found the twins walking toward school in company with Jack Winslow and Edgar Sherman.

After a few scattering remarks, Jack said abruptly:

"Tad, some of the fellows would like to have you for president of the Athletic Association. If you 'd consent to run, a lot of 'em would support you, and I think you 'd stand a good show of being elected."

"Better try it, Tad," Edgar Sherman urged. "We 've sounded quite a number, and the fellows all say that they 'd rather vote for you than for Bert Halsey. Wagstaff can't get near

enough to the office to see it with a telescope, so it 'd be a race between you and Bert."

"Why, I don't know," Tad responded slowly, immensely pleased at the idea, but not caring to appear over-eager to enter the field, "Halsey's pretty popular, you know, and it might make hard feelings between us if I ran against him. He's anxious to be elected, and if no other candidate enters the race, most likely he will be."

"That's right!" Jack agreed. "Halsey'll be elected unless a stronger fellow is put up against him. Yet, a lot of the fellows don't want to support him on account of his nasty temper. If he'd keep cool and hang on to himself, there'd be no use of you or any one else running against him. With his athletic record, and all the friends he has, it'd be a walkover for him."

"We don't want a president who goes up in the air when things don't suit him," Edgar argued. "He might disgrace the school. I advise you to run, Tad. A lot of the fellows would jump at the chance to vote for you, because they won't vote for Wagstaff and don't like to support Halsey—not that they don't

like him, you know, but they 're afraid of a display of fireworks after he gets elected. You know how bad it would be if he should get started, at some time when, for the sake of the school, he ought to keep cool."

"You 're just the fellow we want, Tad," Jack urged. "You would n't get mad if a steam roller ran over you. You 're prominent in athletics, and you can handle the fellows. You have a way of getting 'em to do things that does n't hurt their feelings. It would be a fine thing for the school as well as for the association, if you 'd take the job."

"What do you think about it, Tom?" Tad asked, turning to his brother, who had not yet expressed an opinion. "To run or not to run, that is the question."

"You're a good runner, Tad," was the prompt reply. "I'd try for it, if I were you."

"Thus speaketh the wise one," Tad responded, and his tone showed that his mind was made up. "Gentlemen of the committee, I hereby accept your kind nomination. [Applause.] I shall run upon a simple platform of boards. [Laughter and applause.] My opponents [groans] shall have a square deal and

anything else I can give 'em that costs nothing. [Cheers.] If you see fit to elect me [Voice, "You just better believe we will" I pledge myself to make the fame of the Athletic Association known from the Atlantic to the Pacific; from the Harlem River to Gowanus Canal, and then some. [Wild cheers.] Our athletes shall be in the first rank [Voice, "Some are rank now"], and shall go forth boldly conquering and to conquer. We will proudly bear the colors of our beloved school into the fray and ever bear them hence victoriously in well-earned triumph. [Loud cheers.] Never shall they be allowed to trail in the dust of defeat. Gentlemen, I thank you, and I ask that you and your friends will vote for me from the opening of the polls even unto the closing of the same." [Tremendous applause and loud cheering.]

This startling speech, delivered with vigorous gestures and humorous parenthetical comments, lasted until the boys entered the school domain. Others gathered about the speaker in time to hear the concluding sentences, and friends of the candidate quickly acquainted them with the fact that Tad had decided to enter the contest for the coveted office of presi-

dent of the Athletic Association. The news passed rapidly from one to another before the day ended, and it was very generally known throughout the school when classes were dismissed at the conclusion of the afternoon session.

At the noon recess, Jack Winslow sought Tad and drew him aside into a quiet corner of the basement.

"Tad," he said earnestly, "why don't you let that thing about Halsey get out now? You need n't say anything very definite, of course. Just drop a few words here, and a hint there, and an intimation somewhere else. It soon would be all over the school, and a rumor like that would pretty nearly kill Halsey's chances of election."

Tad shook his head in a gesture of positive dissent, as he replied decidedly, "No, Jack! If I'd thought of doing anything about it, just for the honor of the school, or the good name of the class, I would n't do it now, the way things have developed. Anyhow, I'm going to give Halsey a chance to explain those physiology notes. He may not have had any idea of cheating. I don't believe in mud-slinging in a campaign like this—or in any other kind, for that

matter. No, no, Jacko, old top! You need n't fool yourself with the idea that I'm going to circulate stories that would injure Halsey, even if I have a whole pile of evidence to prove that they 're true.'

"I did n't think you 'd do it," Jack acknowledged, and there was a trace of disappointment in his tone. "Anyhow, I brought you the suggestion for what it was worth."

"I know how you feel, old man," Tad responded, seizing Jack's shoulders in a grip of fraternal comradeship. "You are crazy to have me win, and you want to help me along all you can. Also, you want me to do a little helping on the side. I'm much obliged for your suggestion, even if I can't use it. If you have any more, just bring 'em around. I'm making a collection of them."

Jack laughed good-naturedly. "You're a great old Tad," he declared. "You've sized up the way I feel exactly. I don't love Halsey well enough to care what stories you circulate about him. Still, I can understand how you feel, and I admire you for sticking up for your principles the way you're doing."

Further discussion was interrupted by the

signal bell which sounded just then, and soon both boys were hard at work in the classrooms above.

That evening, while the twins were supposed to be hard at work preparing their lessons for the next day, Tom noticed that his brother was writing a letter, the composition of which appeared to cause him considerable perplexity and anxious thought. Several times, Tom's curiosity urged him almost to the point of inquiring for whom the carefully worded missive was intended, but he restrained himself and prudently waited, hoping that time would reveal the secret to him.

Presently, Tad leaned back with a sigh of relief.

"There! that 's done!" he exclaimed, pushing the paper across the table for his brother's inspection. "Read that campaign document, Tommy, and see if you don't think it 's worthy a place among the famous letters of history."

Tom picked up the paper with undisguised interest, and this is what he read:

Dear Bert:

You and I have known each other for some time. We have been in meets together and have worked on the track

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team for a year in an attempt (pretty successful, I'm glad to say) to uphold the honor of the school. For this reason, I don't want to seem in any way unfriendly to you, and I hope you won't misunderstand my meaning in sending you this letter.

Some of the fellows have asked me to run for president of the Athletic Association. There seems to be no reason why I should n't run, and I'm willing to admit that I'd like to have the place, so I have said that I would try for it. I shall not start an active campaign, nor do anything that will injure your chances of success.

It seems only fair that I should tell you something that I noticed last June, and give you a chance to explain the matter. After the physiology exam, you walked home with Tom and me. Coming out of the gate, you reached up and swung on the iron bar, and we noticed that your cuffs were covered with shorthand notes. These seemed to have something to do with the questions that we'd had in the exam.

I don't like to think that you would do anything not absolutely on the square, so it seems the most friendly thing under the circumstances to tell you all about it, and give you a chance to explain. If I hear from you within a week, I'll know that everything's as you tell me.

Tom and I saw the marks on your cuffs plainly enough, and so it's likely that others did, too. Unless you square yourself now, some stories may get out (you know how such rumors do float around during a campaign) that will put a dent in your chances of success.

Hoping that we shall remain good friends, in spite of our present rivalry, I am

Fraternally yours,
Thaddeus Townsend, Third.

"That 's all right, Tad!" was Tom's comment. "It 's a good, clear, straight-from-the-shoulder letter, and if Bert Halsey gets his back up over it, he deserves to be suspected of cheating."

"I hate to go around feeling suspicious of a fellow all the time," Tad announced. "When you have nothing but circumstances that look crooked, but may not be, on which to build your suspicions, it does n't seem hardly fair to suspect a fellow of anything like this. The least I can do is to give Halsey a chance to explain."

"Suppose he does n't take it; what then?"

Tad shrugged his shoulders. "Then I suppose there 's nothing to keep me from being as suspicious as I want to be," he made answer, "but I think Bert 'll be able to straighten out this whole snarl. I felt as if I ought to write to him, or tell him when I had a chance, that I 'd decided to run against him for president of the A. A. It seems more friendly that way than to leave the telling to the other fellows, and let Bert think I 'm afraid to do it myself. We 've always been good friends, and I don't want to do anything now to hurt his feelings."

"Going to mail this to Bert?"

"Yes. I have all kinds of money this week. I'm rolling in wealth! Why, I even can afford to buy a two-cent stamp to speed this tender epistle on its way," and Tad sealed the envelope, marked it "Personal" in large letters, and went out whistling a merry tune.

"He 's a great old Tad," Tom confided to his arithmetic. "He 'd be tickled to death if he won this election, yet, if he should n't, you 'd never know that he cared a hoot."

And the arithmetic must have agreed, for it made no reply.

The letter, over which Tad had worked so carefully, was handed to Gilbert Halsey as he left home for school on the morning following. He tore open the envelope, but, just as he was on the point of drawing out the folded sheet of note-paper, one of his most zealous henchmen hailed him, and Halsey hurried across the street to discuss the progress of his campaign.

He thrust the letter under the strap which held his books together, taking less care to make it secure than he might if he had suspected the nature of the message it conveyed. He walked slowly along, talking earnestly with his chief lieutenant, and swinging his books ab-

sent-mindedly by the strap. After the bundle of books had sustained its third collision with posts and other solid objects, the letter was jarred so far from its original position that the light breeze caught it, and whirled it beyond the sidewalk, while Halsey passed on unheeding.

A boy who had been walking some forty or fifty yards behind Halsey saw the incident and picked up the letter, intending to return it as soon as he could overtake Bert. Glancing at the envelope, he noticed the significant word "Personal," and his curiosity was stirred. In justice to the boy, it ought to be said that he had no thought of serious wrongdoing when he slyly drew out the sheet and glanced at it. It was an act prompted chiefly by curiosity, although there was a trace of mischief, too. He fancied that it might contain some material wherewith to taunt the quick-tempered candidate for office.

Unfortunately for Halsey, this boy aspired to membership in that select coterie of which Simon Wagstaff was the leader and executive force. At once, he realized that the facts recited in this letter would give Simon an advan-

tage over other candidates, so he permitted ambition to stifle the protests of conscience, and thrust the letter into an inner pocket for future use.

CHAPTER IV

THE EXCITEMENT OF A PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

DURING the busy days that followed, Tad was encouraged by many assurances of support from friends in the school. True to the promise made in his letter to Gilbert Halsey, he conducted no active campaign, but contented himself with jocular references to his candidacy, and humorous promises to inaugurate all manner of impossible reforms, should he be elected.

His friends, however, were not slothful, nor were they indifferent to the progress of the campaign. Though they used no spectacular methods nor any plan of action open to hostile criticism, they kept quietly and persistently at work.

Lists of students were compiled and divided among Jack Winslow, Edgar Sherman, Tom, and a few more of Tad's most intimate friends. The students thus listed were interviewed, the

issues carefully explained, the candidates frankly discussed, and then the interview concluded with an appeal to vote for Tad.

This loyal support was appreciated very deeply by Tad, but he warned his friends that they must not "run down" the other candidates in order to help him. He threatened to withdraw from the race if he found that his campaign managers were using tactics unfair to other candidates, and, knowing that he would keep his word, they proceeded with great caution.

A week had passed since Tad had sent his letter to Gilbert Halsey, and no response or acknowledgment of any kind had been received. Tad was sorely disappointed, and was forced to admit with reluctance that his suspicions must grow stronger, instead of being swept away, as he had hoped they might be.

One afternoon, Edgar Sherman and Jack Winslow dashed into the gym, where Tad was practising for an interscholastic meet, and excitedly summoned him to a conference.

Somewhat breathless, and decidedly warm, he left the track and followed them into the dressing-room.

"What's up now?" he panted, seating himself on a bench. "Czar of Russia sent me a bomb?"

"Something nearer home than that, Tad," Edgar Sherman replied excitedly. "What do you think? There 's a rumor around that Halsey had his cuffs covered with notes during the exams last June, and cribbed the whole thing. Everybody 's talking about it, and a good many seem to think it 's straight goods. That ought to mean a lot of votes for you."

Tad was startled. For a minute, a suspicion entered his mind that Jack had yielded to temptation far enough to share with others the secret which the twins had told him in confidence. Jack must have guessed what was passing through his mind, for he said quickly:

"We don't know how the report started, Tad. I give you my word that none of our fellows set such a story going. It came from somewhere outside, and seems to be all over school, but whoever is back of it has been so slick that we can't locate him."

"Poor Halsey!" muttered Tad. "I'm sorry for him. It is awful for a fellow to have such a rumor going around about him."

"Is it true, Tad?" Edgar asked eagerly. "Do you know anything about it?"

"As a rule, Ed, I don't take much stock in these gossipy stories that float around about the different fellows," was the quiet reply. "Some of them may be true, but a lot of them are far from it. If this is true, we'd better stick up for Halsey until he's proven guilty. If there should be nothing but hot air in the rumor, we'll feel a heap better afterward if we've been among those who didn't add anything to it as it went around."

There was a moment of silence, and then Jack said:

"We thought we ought to tell you right away, Tad, so we hunted you up just as fast as we could get here."

"Much obliged!" Tad cried heartily. "I suppose you fellows think I m a cold-blooded dub, without much fighting spirit. I guess I am. Don't think, though, that I m not grateful for all the work you fellows and the others are doing for me. If I m elected, it will be on account of the swell support you 've given me. A fellow could n't have better friends, and I want you to know that I appreciate your work.

"As for this yarn about Bert, just say—let's see—'When interviewed, Mr. Thaddeus H. Townsend, Third, president-elect of the Athletic Association, said that he had nothing to say."

"All right! We'll get out an extra!" laughed Jack. "Don't let us keep you off the track any longer than you want to stay. We're counting on you, old man, to capture the quarter-mile in that interscholastic next week."

They escorted Tad back to the gym, watched him trot around the track a few times, made sage comments upon his "form," and upon that displayed by several others, then wandered out in search of further news.

The final trials to pick the young athletes who should represent the school in this meet were announced for Friday afternoon of the week which is passing in review in this chapter. Tad had been so confident of being chosen for the quarter-mile that no other possibility had occurred to him, save as accident or illness might make another selection necessary.

He was stunned, therefore, when Bert Halsey, captain of the track team, approached him

on Friday during the noon recess, and announced calmly:

"Townsend, you needn't come out this afternoon. Gray and I will represent the school in the quarter-mile."

The message was so completely unexpected that Tad did not recover from his surprise in time to make a reply. He was indignant that he should have been ruled out of the trials without explanation or excuse—he who had won so many points for the school during the months past. His first impulse was to resign from the track team and take no further part in school athletics. Then his sturdy common sense asserted itself, and he realized how childish it would be to sulk in selfish discontent because an expected privilege had been denied. solved to be loyal to the school, in spite of everything; to use his strength and skill in its behalf whenever such effort was required of him, and to accept quietly and with an outward display of serene good-nature such disappointments as might come. He shrewdly suspected that the excitement of the campaign and perhaps a little feeling of jealousy had prompted the action of the track captain.

Of course, he might have appealed to the director of physical work at the school, but that individual was devoting all his spare time to the football squad and had left the affairs of the track team entirely in the hands of its captain, so Tad resolved not to disturb a busy man, but to swallow the unpalatable dose with as much self-control as he could muster.

Much to the surprise of those students who flocked into the gymnasium after school, Tad did not appear among the contestants for the quarter-mile, nor had any one seen him enter the building after the ending of the school session. Only Tad and Bert Halsey knew the real reason for this absence, and Tad was over a mile away, tramping steadily along and humming a school song to reinforce his loyalty, while Halsey was savagely telling those who inquired that Tad was not going to run.

Halsey did not say that Tad had refused to run, but he permitted this impression to go forth, and very quickly the rumor passed from group to group that Tad Townsend had declined to enter the approaching meet.

"What 's become of Tad?" Jack Winslow demanded anxiously, drawing Tom a little apart from the crowd that thronged the sides of the track. "The fellows don't know what to make of these stories that are going around."

"I wish I could tell you, Jack," Tom answered in a troubled tone. "I saw him at noon, and he said nothing about any change in his plans. As far as I know, he expected to enter the trials to-day. He's been at work here in the gym every afternoon this week trying to clip a few seconds off his record. I don't know what to make of this thing."

(It should be explained here that the meeting at noon to which Tom referred was previous to the announcement made by the track captain. After that came, Tad was too greatly disturbed to think calmly, and so he had not told his brother of the sudden enforced change in his plans. In fact, he had not seen Tom since, except in the classroom, where school rules placed the ban of silence upon him. Hence, Tom was ignorant of the reason for his brother's mysterious disappearance.)

"I think it's a campaign trick," Jack observed, glaring indignantly at Bert Halsey who

passed just then. "Halsey would like first rate to create the impression that Tad's a quitter."

"Maybe Bert thinks Tad started that yarn about cribbing the exams from those shorthand notes," Tom suggested. "If that's the case, it would be like him to keep Tad out of this meet, just for revenge. Being captain of the team, he could tell him not to run, and that would end it. It also would give him a show to make out that Tad had quit for some personal reason."

"By George! I believe you 're right!" Jack cried. "I'll find out! Ed Sherman 's trying out for the four-forty relay. I'll get him to go to Bert Halsey and make him tell what game he 's trying to play."

Jack hurried off, forcing his way through the crowd of boys until he located Edgar. To him, he related what had passed between himself and Tom, ending with an urgent appeal for Edgar to see the track captain and force him to make an honest explanation.

Edgar grunted uncertainly. "Halsey has one of his cranky spells on," he announced, "but I'm not afraid of him. I'd just as lief

stir him up as not! Wait a bit and I 'll tell you the result."

Five minutes passed—ten—fifteen. The first events were being contested on the track. Jack waited impatiently, wondering what had happened to the fleet-footed Mercury who had sped upon his errand. Presently, he saw this ambassador hurrying toward him.

"You're right!" Edgar announced. "Halsey's cross as two sticks, and I risked my neck in the cause. I asked him why Tad Townsend was n't running, and he snapped out that he was too busy to answer questions. I thought perhaps it might be a good idea to sort of take his mind off other things, so I tripped him up and sat on him. He was ripping! He could have chewed me up! I just sat there until he had cooled off a bit; then I said, 'Now, look here, Halsey! I want to know whether you told Tad not to run, and I shan't get up until you give me an honest answer.'

"Yes, I did! he bellowed, loud enough for everybody around to hear. 'He's too stuck on himself, and too sure of winning. He has n't been showing good form lately. Gray has taken his place.'

"I thanked him politely, and hurried right back to tell you, but he really seemed quite peeved at what I did. He said things to me as I left that were positively rude, don't you know, not to say violent."

"I imagine he did," Jack responded grimly. "He can when he gets started. That action is just a campaign trick, and you can see that Halsey's sore. Why, Gray can't run! He's an ice-cart! If Halsey can't use somebody better than Gray, he'll find that the school'll jump on him for bad management."

"You'd better let it be known that Tad has n't quit because he wanted to, Jack," Edgar suggested, "and I'll do all I can, too. There goes the signal for the four-forty. I'll have to appear on the scene," and he hurried toward the track.

Jack worked industriously, passing from one group to another and explaining Tad's absence. Whenever he discovered a particular friend who was working in the same cause, he drafted him into service, and for this reason certain students failed to see much of the spectacular elimination contests, so active were they in promoting the candidacy of Tad.

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In the evening, Jack and Edgar called at the Townsend home and found the twins in possession, their parents having gone out. The library was converted into a council-chamber, and the campaign managers eagerly discussed the prospects of their candidate.

"I believe this latest stunt of Halsey's will hurt him more than anything he could have done," Jack asserted. "If the school gets left in the quarter-mile to-morrow night, it will cost him easily a hundred votes. He's working to beat the band, trying to get fellows pledged to vote for him, but Tad is more popular than Bert, and I'm looking for his election, with votes to spare. The fellows have confidence in Tad, and that's more than they have in Bert Halsey."

"The winner has to have a majority of the votes," Tom reminded them. "Tad may get more than Bert, or Simon, or the rest of 'em, but there are so many in the field to divide the whole number cast that I 'm afraid he won't have enough. Why, just suppose the vote runs up to fifteen hundred. Tad would have to get seven hundred and fifty-one. That 's an awful pile."

"Oh, well! what 's the use of fretting?" Tad responded cheerfully. "You fellows look as if you 'd put all your money in a bank that 's just failed, with only enough left to give each depositor a quarter of a cent on the dollar. If the fellows want me, they 'll vote for me. If they don't, they won't, and you can't make them."

"You don't seem to be much worked up over it, Tad," Jack remarked, "but then, I did n't suppose you would be. I dare say you 'll take a nap while the votes are being counted."

"Might as well," Tad replied with an amiable grin. "I can't afford to miss my beauty sleep, you know."

And the others were sufficiently unkind to assure him that he spoke truly.

The following evening brought the indoor fall meet of the New York City high schools, and a steady stream of spectators flowed through the main entrance of one of the great armories, while eager contestants swarmed about and through a smaller side door reserved for them. People began to arrive during the early evening, and before the time apointed for the start of the first event, the immense drill

hall was packed with partizans of the competing schools, while others were arriving constantly.

It was a scene to make one's heart beat faster—the great hall draped with flags, the enthusiastic spectators massed under the colors of the respective schools and waving their pennants eagerly whenever the cheer leaders gave the signal for one or another of the school yells, the busy, hurrying officials on the floor striving to arrange final details, the lightly clad athletes, wearing their school colors, trotting around the track or wandering restlessly about, wishing that their events might soon be called.

Mr. and Mrs. Townsend had expected to attend the meet, with Tom as guide to explain the interesting points that an ordinary spectator, not closely in touch with school life, might miss. An unexpected business development, however, called Mr. Townsend out of the city during the early evening, so Tad used his father's ticket, and Mrs. Townsend had a twin on either side as she watched the exciting contests which meant so much to them.

Tad outwardly was calm and unconcerned, yet there was a queer feeling in his heart—half

regret, half resentment—as he watched the sturdy champions of his school, and remembered that, through no fault of his, he was a mere spectator instead of an actor in the stirring drama.

"The quarter-mile comes next," Tom announced grimly, when the meet had been in progress more than an hour. "Now we'll see Halsey's brilliant management come to grief."

Mrs. Townsend must have surmised what thoughts possessed Tad's mind as the contestants took their places, for she reached across quietly, and placed her hand gently upon his. Through her glove, she could feel the tremor that indicated his distress, but he looked at her and smiled—a pathetic, mournful smile, but nevertheless a brave effort to appear cheerful. It was harder than he had supposed it would be to sit there and see another running in his place.

All about him, students were cheering madly, while their elders exhibited a more dignified form of enthusiasm. Over and over, the name of Halsey was roared forth by voices that were becoming husky with vociferous use. Then a

tense silence settled over the assembly as the starter raised his pistol.

Bert Halsey and Gray were the sole representatives of the school, having defeated other candidates in trials held the previous day. It became apparent as soon as the starter's pistol sounded that Halsey was nervously eager to demonstrate his speed, for he sprang forward, sprinted, and took first place. Several of his competitors made impulsive attempts to follow him, but prudently restrained themselves. Gray jogged along with the "rear guard" at a steady pace.

"Grandstand starts mean tail-end finishes," muttered Tad. "Halsey 'll never in the world be able to hold that pace for the full quarter."

Now the runners were quickening the pace. The race was half run. Now a man drew nearer to Halsey, still nearer, and a rousing cheer from a section across the armory showed that the leader had been passed.

The excitement of the occasion, instead of nerving Gray to his best effort, seemed to have an oppressive influence upon him, for he ran less well than he had in the trials, and seemed

utterly unable to get away from those who were falling behind in the race.

Halsey had run himself out in the first half of the race, and now his stride faltered and his breath came in choking gasps. One after another drew up to him and forged ahead, so that, as they staggered up to the tape at the finish, only a narrow margin separated the track captain from the last man. Gray finished sixth.

There were no cheers in the section where Tad sat—only an excited buzz of conversation, and suddenly he became aware that heads were turning toward him, as if he might be figuring in the remarks of his fellow-students.

Tad's cheeks flamed, and he looked straight across the armory, though he could see nothing distinctly because of the confused, misty blur that, for the moment, clouded his vision.

The Athletic Association met on the Monday afternoon following, and several candidates were nominated to succeed the retiring president. This was purely a formal action, since each of the nominees had been carrying on a more or less vigorous campaign for several weeks. Much business was discussed at the meeting, and several important matters settled,

but the one of greatest interest to the school in general was the appointment of Thursday of that week for election day. The polls were required to remain open from eight-thirty in the morning until three-thirty in the afternoon, and the announcement of the result was promised at assembly on Friday morning.

The excitement and activity of the campaign became more concentrated and intense during these last few days. Tad tried his best to appear unconcerned, but he admitted to Tom that "the bloomin' thing was beginning to get on his nerves."

Halsey had not spoken to him since the day when he had curtly notified him that he need not enter the try-outs for the recent meet. Jack and Edgar reported that he was cranky and "grouchy," though working early and late to win the election. Rumor persistently whispered that Halsey had been guilty of some questionable scheme to refresh his memory at the June examinations. Moreover, the school very generally understood why it lost the quarter-mile run, and held Halsey responsible. Hence, his prospect of election became no brighter as the final day approached, though

many upper-classmen had pledged their support to him on principle, believing that Tad was too young for the office. Bert was a little more than a year older than Tad.

Tuesday passed and Wednesday. Thursday was a period of suppressed excitement in the school, and rival campaign managers worked diligently to see that every available vote was cast.

The assembled students in the large auditorium on Friday morning were unusually restless, and the principal, shrewdly suspecting the cause, made the preliminary exercises as brief as possible.

Then, drawing a folded paper from his pocket, he stepped forward, while a kind of tense stillness took the place of former confusion and restlessness.

"I have an important announcement to make," he commenced. "Our annual vote for president of the Athletic Association has been cast, and is large enough to assure us that it represents the sentiment—divided to be sure, but nevertheless genuine—of the entire student body. It is no light task to inspect and count more than fifteen hundred ballots, and to those

who have spent their time and given so generously of careful, painstaking effort to discover the result we tender our most profound thanks.

"It is a self-evident fact that when several candidates strive for the same office, some must be disappointed. To those who have failed I bring the reminder that it is a pleasant thing to be thought worthy this office by so many voters, even though the number be insufficient to elect.

"Loyalty to the school must be stronger than our loyalty to any candidate for a school office. Our duty is clear. We must lay aside all personal feeling and support, to the limit of our ability, him whom the students have just elected to the presidency of the Athletic Association.

"Bearing this thought in mind, I will ask you to listen to the report of the inspectors of election:

Total number of votes cast		1,575
Necessary to a choice		788
Thaddeus H. Townsend, Third	798	
Gilbert Halsey	452	
Simon Wagstaff	213	
James Falkner		
Harold Bates		
Blank and Scattering	5	
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Thaddeus H. Townsend, Third, is declared elected."

An outburst of enthusiastic applause swept over the auditorium. Now that the election was over, it seemed as if the partizans of other candidates were willing to cheer the successful man in the spirit which the principal had so earnestly urged.

There were calls for a speech, and the principal smilingly appointed two upper-classmen who sat near a committee to escort the president-elect to the platform.

Very red of countenance, and horribly embarrassed, Tad was led forward until he stood beside the principal. The students hushed their tumultuous applause to hear what he had to say.

"Gentlemen, I present to you the presidentelect of the Athletic Association," the principal announced. Then he stepped back and Tad found himself alone on the platform, looking into more than fifteen hundred faces. It seemed to him that he could not breathe. Faces suddenly appeared everywhere, all turned toward him. He opened his mouth, but no sound came. A strong impulse to run away possessed him.

Then, quickly, the thought came to him that he must look highly ridiculous standing there where so many eminent men had stood, and for the same purpose—to address the school. The idea amused him, and the cheerful grin which his friends so well knew appeared on his face.

Just in time, Tad remembered to bow to the principal, who returned it and seated himself. Then Tad took a deep breath and faced the school.

"Fellows," he began, "I didn't get up any speech, because I was n't sure that I 'd need it. If I 'd prepared one and had been defeated, all that time and work would have been wasted. Even as it 's turned out, I 'd surely have forgotten anything I ever thought of saying, when I got up here and found everybody looking at me. I'm not strong on speeches, anyhow. I can work better. I think the Athletic Association needs work more than talk, so I 'll quit my speech and get busy.

"I thank all you fellows who voted for me, and forgive everybody who didn't. Whether you voted for me or not, I hope you'll work hard for the A. A. It needs your support, and

so does the whole athletic life of the school. I guess that 's all I have to say just now."

The cheering started afresh as Tad hurried off the platform, and the principal wisely allowed the boys to liberate all their enthusiasm in a final burst of melody, by bringing the exercises to a conclusion with the most popular school song, one that voiced sentiments of harmony, fellowship, and united effort.

CHAPTER V

HALSEY DISCOVERS THE CAMP TRUST

It was difficult for the school to settle into the routine of classroom duties after all this excitement, but that particular Friday brought the monthly tests, or written reviews of certain studies, and this ordeal quenched the last lingering spark of enthusiasm when the boys returned to their several classes.

The morning passed before any of Tad's friends had opportunity to congratulate him, but during the noon recess they quite overwhelmed him, so that he had difficulty in finding sufficient time for luncheon.

"Well, Demosthenes!" cried Tom, seizing his brother and cordially thumping him on the back to express his delight. "That was a great oration you gave us this A. M."

Tad grinned amiably. "Say, I was scared to death!" he acknowledged. "It's awful!

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You have no idea what it 's like to stand up there all alone, with no one around you—"

"It would be more sociable to stand up there all alone with a crowd around," Tom commented.

"That's what they all say! Here comes Jack, and a whole bunch with him!—Thanks!—Yes, it was!—Glad you think so!—Yes, I hope so, I'm sure!—Good of you to say that, old man! I appreciate it!—Yes, I didn't know what to say!—Piffle! You always were a gasbag!—Thanks, awfully!—Yes, and we're going to count on your help!—Good! we need it!—Yes, I think it was!—" and so on, until Tom, and Jack, and Edgar dragged him away and mounted guard over him while he ate his luncheon in some measure of peace.

"Hurry home after school, Tad," his brother admonished him, when the first bell sounded its warning. "I have a job that 'll give us a little trip and fifty cents for the camp fund."

Tom had not permitted the excitement of the campaign to weaken his determination to spend his next vacation at the camp which he had so enthusiastically described to his parents.

Jack Winslow and Edgar Sherman had been admitted to the "Camp Trust," as Tad insisted on calling it, and together these boys had deposited the sum of \$5.67 with Tom, as the nucleus of the camp fund.

To be sure, it would require at least seven hundred dollars to conduct the camp for the entire vacation season, but this fact did not trouble the cheerful quartette. They believed that the money would come, somehow, and proved their faith in the outcome by increasing the cash balance in the treasurer's hands, whenever it was possible to do so.

Mindful of his brother's injunction, Tad slipped away from the students who were waiting after school to talk to the president-elect of the Athletic Association, and made such quick time on the homeward trip that he arrived at the house fully three minutes before Tom hurried in.

"What mighty deed of valor awaits us?"
Tad demanded, drawing himself up to his full height and flourishing an umbrella as he might a sword. "What noble crusade promises this rich reward for the camp fund?"

"A right honorable feat of arms," Tom re-

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plied with a laugh. "Miss Spriggs, next door, wants us to take two suit-cases and a bag over to the West Shore Station."

"Hurray, hurrah, hurroo! What's she got against the express companies?"

"One of 'em dropped her trunk off the wagon last year, and hurt its feelings quite some. She 'll pay our fare, and give us fifty cents besides if we take 'em over and check 'em for her. She 's going off to spend a few weeks up in the Catskills."

"She 'll freeze!"

"No, she won't! They have mountain ranges up there to heat the country. Come along! She'll have a conniption fit if we're late."

The boys secured the baggage and the fee (which Miss Spriggs thoughtfully paid in advance). Then they started toward Weehawken, the goal of their pilgrimage.

"This has been a hard day for Halsey," Tad remarked, when they were on the car. "I'm afraid he's in bad now."

"Why? Anything new happened?"

Tad nodded. "I sat right across the aisle from him this morning, and two seats behind.

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He was awfully disappointed at losing the election. You could see that he was all broken up when he came in. He just flopped into his seat, and sat staring at the desk without taking notice of anything. Pretty soon, he picked up his question sheet, and went to work like all possessed. I didn't pay much attention to him after that, for some of those questions were corkers, and I needed all the time there was. Just before twelve, I finished. Then I looked across, and saw Halsey take a paper out of his pocket and open it. He seemed to be writing on it, and I remembered those notes on his cuffs, so I could n't help wondering what this performance meant.

"I guess 'Prof.' Butler must have spotted him, too, for he walked down the aisle, took my paper, then stopped just behind Halsey. Still Bert worked away, for all he was worth. All at once, Butler reached out and laid his hand on Bert's shoulder, and I wish you could have seen him jump. I don't believe he would have been worse frightened if some one had shot off a gun.

"Then Butler said, 'I 'll trouble you for that paper, Halsey.' You know what a deep, solemn, way-down-in-his-boots voice he has. It

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almost made me shiver to hear him. He picked it up, because Halsey was too scared to do any more than push it toward him. Just as he glanced over it, the bell rang, and all papers had to be handed in. Butler put this sheet in his pocket, and said, 'Report to me this afternoon after school, Halsey.' Then he went on and collected the few papers that were still out.''

"I missed that," Tom replied. "I finished at a quarter of twelve, and went right down stairs after I handed in my paper."

"Halsey must have been afraid to face the music," Tad went on. "He didn't show up this afternoon."

"Sick, maybe," Tom suggested.

Tad shrugged his shoulders doubtfully. "Perhaps the excitement of the election was too much for him. He looked kind of sick when Butler passed him those few cheerful remarks."

"It does look bad," Tom acknowledged. "Still, he can't expect to dodge the consequences forever. Some day, he'll have to come back and take his medicine. It might as well be now as later."

The twins discussed the matter all the way over to the railroad terminal, but they were no nearer to a complete understanding of the case than when they started, although it proved an interesting subject with which to enliven the conversation en route.

After some little delay, they checked the baggage of their neighbor, and Tom put the checks away carefully in his pocket-book.

"Let's wander around the station and impress the natives," Tad suggested. "There's plenty of time. Miss Spriggs won't need these little souvenirs from the express company until to-morrow. Maybe, if only we can manage to look the part, somebody'll think we're going up to Albany to give the governor a little advice."

Tom laughed at the idea. "You ought to be dressed up in some kind of uniform, Tad, so people will know that you 've been elected to the presidency of the Athletic Association. Then we'd attract attention whenever we appeared in public. Most likely, they'd have to call out the reserves to keep the crowds back."

Laughing and talking gaily, they entered the

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waiting-room, and wandered about, looking with much interest at the novel sights.

Presently Tom cried, "What have we done, Tad? Here comes a cop hot on our trail."

Sure enough, a uniformed representative of the majesty of the law was walking toward them, waving his hand to attract their attention.

"He wants you, Tom," Tad made haste to say. "You look like a suspicious character, and he 's going to arrest your progress."

The officer was close to them now.

"There's a boy over here," he began abruptly, and with a strong Irish accent, "and he's wearing a hat just like yours." (The twins wore felt outing hats with bands that proclaimed their connection with the school.) "I've got boys of my own, and by the same token, I ought to know when a boy's in trouble. This one certainly looks upset. Maybe you know him. He's sitting over there in that corner, and he's been there for two solid hours—never taking notice of anything, but just looking down at the floor till you might think his eyes'd bore holes in it. Take a look at him, boys. Maybe you can cheer him up a bit.

I won't be far off, in case you need any help."

The twins were naturally kind-hearted and would have been quick to respond to this appeal, even if there had not been in it that which stimulated their curiosity. They could see a school hat-band in the corner which the friendly policeman had indicated, and toward it they now directed their footsteps. Soon they were near enough to recognize the wearer, and both boys were beyond measure surprised to discover Gilbert Halsey in this unexpected place. They seated themselves on the bench, one on either side of the disconsolate track captain, but he did not rouse himself from his gloomy meditation sufficiently to recognize them. Finally, Tad leaned forward, and said in a low tone:

"Hello, Halsey! We didn't expect to find you here."

The shock of discovery seemed to stun Halsey for a minute, and he looked at the boys without speaking. At length, he said bitterly:

"I might have known that you 'd appear on the scene, Tad Townsend! You always seem to get mixed up in my affairs, when things go

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wrong. Perhaps that 's what I'm waiting for! I've been hanging around this place for two hours, waiting for something—I don't know what. That is, I didn't know! Now, I think I do. I must have been waiting for you to come and gloat over finding me down and out."

"Fiddlesticks!" Tad responded calmly, ignoring Halsey's manner. "What under the sun's up, anyhow?"

"I'm going away!" Bert declared excitedly. "Everything's gone against me, and I'm clearing out, to begin all over again."

"Aw, cut the melodrama!" Tad advised. "The idea of you talking about beginning over again. You have lots of friends. You're doing well in school. You're captain of the track team, and one of the bright stars on the 'varsity eleven. You're right in the inner circle of school athletics. What more do you want?"

"There are a lot of ugly stories going around about me," Halsey suggested sullenly.

"Well, what of it? Did you ever know an election to pass without dragging out a lot of gossip about the different candidates?" Tad

replied with a show of exasperation. "You 're not a kid, Bert! Great Pompey's goat! Can't you stand a little talk?"

"I don't like to have my honesty doubted, and some of the stories made me out a sneak and a cheat," Halsey retorted, with an air of injured innocence.

"You're partly to blame for that, Bert," Tad reminded him. "I wrote to you some little time ago, and asked you to explain a thing that looked queer. I never heard a peep out of you. Why didn't you clean up the fuss when you had a chance?"

"I never had any letter from you, Tad!"

"You didn't? Well, that 's mighty strange! Tom read it before I sent it off, and then I went out and mailed it. It was one night, just about two weeks ago. You ought to have had it in the first delivery the next morning."

"Oh, I did get a letter!" Bert acknowledged, as his memory suddenly recalled the circumstances. "It came one morning just as I left for school. I—I—lost it, before I read it."

This announcement paralyzed Tad with a sudden rush of conflicting emotions, so Tom took advantage of his brother's condition of

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amazed speechlessness, and continued the discussion:

"That's how your troubles began," he declared. "Most likely, some fellow picked up that letter and read it. He found out from it that you had your cuffs covered with notes last June when you took physiology. He spread the report, and you blamed Tad and me. We never said a word about that thing to any one except Jack Winslow, and he can be trusted to keep his tongue from working when it ought not to. There was a good reason for telling him; otherwise we would n't have let it out at all."

Halsey seemed bewildered, and it was a full minute before he spoke.

"What a mess I've made of things!" he groaned finally. "I knew that you two fellows saw those notes on my cuffs, and of course I jumped at the conclusion that you started the rumor to spoil my election. I was so sore about it that I cut Tad out of the try-outs, and that lost the quarter-mile for the school. Naturally enough, the fellows blamed me for bad management, and for dragging personal feeling into school affairs. There was n't any

chance of my election after the meet, and I knew that I had only myself to blame, but still that didn't keep me from feeling sore and cross. Then, this morning, Butler caught me in another thing that looked queer, and I knew it would soon be reported all over school. Naturally, it would make fellows believe that the other story was true, even if they had n't thought so up to now. I felt desperate. I didn't care what happened to me, so I decided to get out."

"Well, the best thing to do now is to get back in again," Tom declared, as Halsey paused. "You've just lost your temper and blamed other people for things that ought to have been charged to your account. You can't help anything by running away, and leaving all the snarls behind. Don't you see that? Why don't you get back there and straighten these things out, then make up your mind that you're going to keep a good grip on yourself?"

"That 's easy enough to say," Bert sighed. "Well, are you looking for soft snaps?" Tad cried, returning to the vocal combat. "Great Pompey's goat! Do you mean to say that you can't break up that habit of going 'way, 'way

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up in the air when things don't suit you? Why, man, with your will power and common sense, you might jump on that thing so hard that it would n't be an everlasting nuisance to you."

"Of course, nobody expects you to be a molly!" Tom added. "You don't have to make a door-mat of yourself and let everybody walk on you, in order to show that you have your temper right where you want it. A fellow can't help feeling mad once in a while, but he can help showing it in ways that are—er—violent. It 's a matter of will power, Halsey, and that 's one of your strong points. If you make up your mind that you 're going to keep cool, don't you suppose you can do it? I don't say it 's easy! I don't say you 'll get there right away, but if you keep plugging away—why, you 'll see a gain each time."

Halsey looked crestfallen and ashamed. His attitude of sullen resentment had vanished, and it seemed now as if his better nature would triumph in the conflict with his baser impulses.

"You fellows have given me what I deserved," he acknowledged with a degree of humility vastly different from the melodra-

matic air he had at first assumed. "I guess I just needed somebody to sail into me like a Dutch uncle. If you'd sympathized with me and pitied me, I'd have been worse than ever."

"It does n't seem quite friendly to jump on a fellow this way, Bert," Tad responded, "but we like you first rate and always have. We hate to see you losing good friends by being so cranky and unreasonable."

"My temper cost me the election," Halsey muttered.

He was silent a minute. Then he sprang to his feet and smote the back of the long bench.

"I'm going to conquer this thing!" he cried.
"It's cost me too much, already! I'm not a
baby, and I'll just show everybody that I can
control myself, now that I've made up my mind
to do it."

"Bully!" Tad exclaimed, patting him on the back.

"That's the talk!" Tom added heartily. "Believe me, you'll have lots more friends if you stick to that program. Better come back with us now. We're going over on the next boat."

Bert hesitated a moment, then, with a sigh

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that probably expressed relief, moved toward the door, and the boys walked out together toward the ferry-slip. Tad looked back, as they left the waiting-room, and saw again the friendly face of the policeman. He nodded approvingly and waved his hand in a gesture of parting salutation—or perhaps it was expressive of quiet congratulation at the happy ending of a drama that might have been a tragedy.

"I suppose it's too late now to explain about those shorthand notes," Halsey began, when they were on the boat, "but I'd like you to know that I didn't cheat. All my life, ever since I can remember, I've been impatient. I can't wait to see how things are coming out. In an examination, I want to know my per cent. just as soon as the thing's over. I used to look up the answers the minute I could get at my books, and then try to remember whether I'd written that thing or some other. Now, the exams are so long and hard that I can't recall the whole lot of answers, so I take 'em down in shorthand whenever I have time.

"Last June, you remember, we weren't allowed to have any paper except the question

sheets and two pieces from the regulation pads for answers. I finished long before the time limit, so I copied my answers in shorthand on my cuffs, until there was no more room.

"Same way this morning! I was taking down a copy of my answers in shorthand when Butler grabbed me. This time, I used another piece of paper and saved laundry bills, but otherwise it was about the same performance as last June. If Butler 'd had time to translate the hen-tracks, of course he 'd have seen through the whole business, but the bell rang just at the wrong time, and he had to collect the rest of the papers. I suppose he jumped at the wrong conclusion!"

"Well, it was the only thing he could do," Tom made answer. "Why didn't you go to him and square yourself?"

"I can see now that I made a bad break by not doing that," Halsey admitted, "but I simply went up in the air, and hardly knew what I was doing. I think I 'll call on him to-morrow. I know where he lives. That 'll be the first step back toward where I want to get."

"Does anybody know that you skipped?"
Tad asked.

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"Only you two. My folks are away for the day, and won't be home until dinner-time."

"Well, we won't say anything about it," Tad assured him, "and if the fellows want to know what became of you, just tell them that you went to Jersey. That 'll be perfectly true—why you went is none of their business."

They had crossed the river now, and were back on the New York shore, where their ways separated. Halsey held out both hands, and the twins each grasped one.

"You fellows have done a big thing for me," he said gratefully. "I'll never forget it, and —and—I'm mighty sorry for the mean way I've acted toward you."

"Forget it," Tad responded cheerfully.
"I'm glad we found you there, Bert. It's a
good thing we had to go over to the station this
afternoon, although, when we started out as
baggage-smashers, we never expected to end up
as foreign missionaries."

"You can count on us, Bert, as long as you stick to the program you 've mapped out," Tom declared, and then they separated with feelings of mutual satisfaction and good will.

The twins had much to talk about as they

rode homeward, and it was not long before Tad proposed that Halsey be added to the party of campers.

"It 'll kind of brace him up," he argued, and give him a few friends who 'll stick up for

him if he strikes another snag."

Tom agreed with enthusiasm, chiefly, it must be admitted, on account of the older brother who seemed so well qualified to act as camp director. The twins agreed, however, that it would be wiser to wait a while and see if Bert "made good."

With this idea in mind, they watched him critically for a week or two. Matters by this time were progressing so favorably that the proposal was submitted to Jack and Edgar, who gave a whole-hearted assent to the proposition to admit Halsey to the Camp Trust. Then Tom interviewed the candidate, told him of all their hopes and ambitions, and won his eager consent to "cast in his lot" with the others.

It was not long after that Jack proposed his friend, Walter Cornwall, for membership in the Trust. Walter was a quiet, well-bred boy who had entered high school at the beginning of the

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term. The others knew him well and liked him much, so he was unanimously voted in.

The entire company wanted Alexander Beckley (who always was called "Lefty" by the boys, partly because he was a left-handed pitcher, and partly, as Tad explained, because he "got left" so often). He won the consent of his parents after the Trust had called en masse upon them, and explained what it was hoped to accomplish.

Lefty was a noisy, jolly, happy-go-lucky fellow, full of mischief, irrepressibly cheerful, and unusually tender-hearted—a quality which he sometimes tried to hide with a sort of gruffness which never deceived any one who knew him at all intimately.

Lefty discovered the fact that a classmate, Eliot Fernard by name, was laboring under the handicap of poor health (he seemed by instinct to discover any one in trouble within a mile of him), and had been advised to get out into the country as soon as warm weather returned. This seemed entirely beyond the resources of the family, so Lefty gave the Trust no peace until Eliot was made unspeakably happy by being admitted to the fellowship. The others

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were thankful many times during the weeks that followed that he was in their company, because he had a vast store of practical knowledge, and, as Jack once said, "No matter what you want to do—anything from making gingertea to building a house—Eliot always knows seventeen ways to do it, and they re all right, too."

Charlie Hayes was added to the Trust just before the Christmas holidays, after Walter Cornwall had worked quietly and tactfully for some weeks to accomplish this end. Charlie was small for his age, but what he lacked in stature, he made up in activity. He was a bright, lively fellow, wholesome and friendly, cool-headed and sensible, and his fellow-campers-to-be liked him better and better the more they associated with him.

Wilbur Halsey (he was n't "Doctor" yet, though his friends took delight in giving him the honorary title) came home from medical college to spend the Christmas holidays. Bert told him about the proposed camp before he had spent twenty-four hours under the parental roof, and after the young man had received answers to all his questions, and had been given

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a frank description of the characteristics of each proposed camper, he agreed to meet with them and talk things over.

As a result of this meeting, he took so strong a liking to this company of merry, wholesome, sturdy fellows that he agreed to manage the camp if, at the beginning of the vacation period, he found himself at liberty to undertake the work.

The boys were strongly drawn toward this genial, sensible, thoughtful young man, and ardently hoped that no unfortunate circumstances would prevent him from going with them to camp.

The weeks passed, and still the Trust consisted of nine boys and the camp leader. Remembering Cousin Willie, the twins believed that it was wiser to have a vacancy in the ranks, in case it should become possible to add him to the party without serious danger to his "life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness," or to that of the other boys.

The passing days were filled with many duties, for most of the boys had to earn and save a large part, if not the entire amount, of their summer expenses. All manner of er-

rands and odd jobs, all sorts of after-school enterprises and Saturday employments, were used as means of swelling the fund which grew steadily larger in a way which might have smitten even the mightiest of trusts with envy.

Then, one night, the tenth camper was added to the party, making it complete, and of this achievement the next chapter will speak.

CHAPTER VI

THE TENTH CAMPER

"WHAT will we call our camp?" Tad asked one evening when the Trust was in session.

"Camp Townsend," Jack suggested promptly. "You two fellows started this thing going. If it had n't been for you, most likely the rest of us would be thinking of staying right in this peaceful village all summer."

"No, that would n't do," Tom hastily interposed. "We don't want to have things named after us just yet. Let's take all our initials, and see if we can't work out a good combination that way."

"Glorious start!" muttered Lefty Beckley. "Four T's, two W's, a G, and a J. We 'd better call it Camp Consonant."

They toiled over the problem for some minutes, but no happy solution was reached. The initials of the several boys furnished so few

vowels that it was almost impossible to arrange any combination that did not sound like the name of a Welsh village.

"There's no use talking," Tad announced finally, throwing down his pencil in despair. "Some of you fellows'll have to change your names. The best I can do with such a job lot of initials is Hestabeth."

"Hestabeth? Who is she, Tad?" Lefty wanted to know.

"Camp Hestabeth would n't be so bad," Charles Hayes remarked. "How do you spell it, Tad?"

"I-t."

"You don't say! You're a good speller, are n't you? I meant, how do you spell Hestabeth?"

"H-e-s-t-a-b-e-t-h."

"Hm-m! Why, that has only nine initials in it. Here's one with eleven—Whattebechs—W-h-a-t-t-e-b-e-c-h-s."

"Eureka!" Jack Sherman cried. "Camp Whattebechs! Do you put a question-mark after it, Charlie?"

"Camp Whattebechs is a pretty name," Lefty commented, "but somehow it seems to

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smite the ear unpleasantly. We want a name with lots of music in it—one that does n't sound like drawing a stick along a picket fence. Now I flatter myself that I have found just what we want. Camp Fatgesbewt—F-a-t-g-e-s-b-e-w-t. How does that strike you?"

"It strikes me all over at once," Edgar Sherman grunted. "I don't believe we'll be able to make anything out of this jumble of letters. I see, though, that we have four T's in the collection—Tad Townsend and Tom Townsend. Why not call it Camp Four-T?"

"Mixed tea would be better," Tad observed. "What we want is a good Indian name."

"Camp Snake-in-the-Grass, or something like that."

"Is n't there some mountain up there?" Eliot Fernard wanted to know. "We might use that for a camp name."

"Split Rock Mountain and Coon Mountain are the nearest."

"Is that so? Well, there 's not much promise there, I 'm afraid, but did n't I hear you say it was near Beaver Creek?"

"Why, yes, it 's just a few miles above it."

"Who knows the Indian name for beaver?"

"Eliot shows his usual sense in appealing to the Indians present," Lefty commented in a stage whisper.

"There's an Indian in front of that cigar store up the block," Tad suggested, reaching for his hat. "I'll go and ask him."

"You need n't bother," replied Tom, who had been looking in the bookcase. "We have a copy of 'Hiawatha' here, and there 's a list in the back giving a lot of animals and other things with their Indian names. I 'll run across it in a minute. Yes, here it is!"

"He's so handy to have around," Lefty murmured. "Simple helps for little learners" is n't needed when—"

"Ah, here you are!" Tom interrupted. "Beaver—Ahmeek—A-h-m-e-e-k."

"That 's a good name," Tad said promptly. "Ahmeek! The meek shall inherit the earth."

"I'd rather have a simple, pretty name like Fatgesbewt," Lefty remarked, "but I have a sweet disposition, gentlemen, and I'll not insist on my suggestion. However, it seems to me Ahmeek has a sort of Arabic sound; I might even say gum arabic."

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"Sounds like a Persian rug!" Gilbert Halsey grunted. "Let's cut out the foreign stuff. Why not talk English and call our place Camp Beaver?"

"A good idea!" Jack exclaimed. "Bee—beaver—beefsteak. We 've been working like busy bees and busy beavers. The beefsteak awaits us."

"I hope so," Tom remarked dolefully, "but I'm afraid we won't have anything but bean soup and prunes unless we raise some more money."

"Are n't we going to make it?" Jack asked in dismay.

"It's a big thing, of course, to raise so much money," Tom went on, drawing a memorandum book from his pocket. "We've worked hard, every one of us, and saved all we could, yet we're quite a bit behind. We figured on ten fellows when we began to make plans, and there's been only nine. That makes the total amount saved considerably less than what it would have been if ten fellows had worked for it. Then again, our expenses at camp will be about the same for nine fellows as for ten, yet it makes the amount that each one has to raise

just that much greater, because you 're dividing by nine instead of by ten."

"Tom talks like an arithmetic," Lefty observed. "Why not divide by ten, anyhow? It's much easier than by nine."

"How can we?" Tom demanded in exasperation. "We have only nine fellows."

"Get another," Lefty suggested laconically.

"I know of one," Tom responded slowly and with evident embarrassment. "He 'd help out our cash balance, all right, but I don't know whether you fellows will want him. He 's a kid cousin of ours—an awful baby, and spoiled, too, but his folks have just barrels of money, and they 'd be mighty glad to pay us for taking him."

"He 's a kid—one point against him," Lefty announced. "He 's a baby—two points. He 's spoiled—three points. But he has money, and we need it—six points in his favor, leaving him three to the good. I'm in favor of gathering in the said cousin."

"How much money do we need, Tom?"
Edgar asked.

Tom consulted his note-book. "Well, altogether we have four hundred thirty-nine dol-

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lars and sixteen cents. That 's doing well, and I don't see how we could have earned much more. Yet it is n't enough. It 's the last of May now, and there are only a few weeks left to increase that to eight hundred and sixty dollars."

There were exclamations of surprise from the boys who thus were brought face to face with a financial crisis in the affairs of the Trust.

"We didn't realize what a big job we'd tackled," Jack observed in a disappointed tone. "We thought, if we all hustled, the money would come—somehow."

"Of course, there 'll be more coming in,"
Tom remarked consolingly. "At the rate
we 've been piling up money lately, we 'll have
about five hundred dollars when school closes.
Then, some of you fellows are getting money
from your folks to help out your expenses.
There 's a hundred and seventy-five dollars that
I know of promised from different ones, and
maybe we can get a little more. We have some
interest, too, on the money we 've had on deposit, so, altogether, we won't be shy much over
a hundred and fifty dollars."

"What makes it cost so like thunder, Tom?"
Charlie Hayes asked. "We 're not going to a stylish place. I should think we might manage to worry along on less."

"We might, Charlie, but I would n't like to take a chance of getting up there and having our cash run out. Suppose we have ten fellows and Doctor Halsey. We'd need two hundred dollars for rent, a hundred and ten for traveling expenses, and not less than five dollars a week for each one's share of the cost of food and supplies. You see, we 're not hiring a furnished camp, so we'll have to buy dishes, cooking things, and such stuff, besides supplies. Five dollars a week from eleven people equals fifty-five dollars. Multiply that by the number of weeks, and you get five hundred and fifty dollars for the season; and this plus rent and traveling expenses equals eight hundred and sixty dollars. That 's the way it works out. You see, it would n't be safe to figure on less. Of course, we'll pay Doctor Halsey's expenses. I was afraid we 'd have to hire some one to run the camp, but as long as he 's been kind enough to do the work for nothing, it 's up to us to take care of him."

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"Then—what did you say his name was—that kid cousin of yours?"

"Ainsworth, Lefty. William Langley Ainsworth, Junior."

"Then your proposition is that we annex Cousin Willie, and incidentally some of his dad's cash?"

Tom nodded. "If he went anywhere to camp, it would cost his father at least a hundred and fifty dollars. He may as well pay that to us as to some outsider, and we need the money. In fact, we can't run our camp more than six weeks unless we get it."

"You see, it's a question whether our longing for Willie's cash is stronger than our longing to get along without Willie," Tad explained.

There was a moment of silence. Then Gilbert Halsey asked, "How old is the kid?"

"About twelve."

"He 's bigger than Charlie, is n't he?"

"Go on!" protested the affronted Charlie.
"If he is, he must be a wonder. I'm growing like a weed. Everybody says so."

"What kind of a weed?" Lefty asked impressively.

"Why, a-a-milkweed."

"Good! Keep it up and you 'll grow to be a milkman."

"Does your cousin want to come with us, Tom?" Walter Cornwall asked.

"Oh, yes! He's crazy to go to camp, and he'd rather go with our crowd than to one of these private camps where he would n't know anybody."

"By which we perceive that Cousin Willie is a wise youth," Lefty solemnly observed. "Even a child is known by the company he keeps. Where could he find—er—more inspiring fellowship, more agreeable society, more —more—ah!—words cannot do justice to my feelings."

"Let him come," Halsey urged. "We need the money for camp expenses, and his father will be glad to pay it for the sake of having the kid with some one he knows, instead of with strangers. Of course, he'll be paying more than the rest of us, but we'll earn that money, I'm thinking, before the summer is over. The youngster will be more or less of a nuisance, I suppose, but we don't need to be afraid of tak-

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ing him. It will be a pity if the nine of us can't handle him."

"He 's not to have any favors, you know, or any special privileges on account of being related to us," Tad observed.

"Don't worry! He won't have!" Lefty declared, with a wink at the others.

"He 's not a bad kid, 'way down under all the rubbish that you 'll notice,' Tom urged in defense of his cousin. "He 's an only child, and, as I said, his father has lots of money, so the kid 's been spoiled. He 's had his own way so long that he expects everybody to give in to him, just as they do at home."

"We'll soon take that out of him," Halsey muttered.

"That 's what he needs," Tom went on. "I think when once he finds that he can't rule the roost, he 'll settle down and really be very decent. He 's been coddled so much that he 's never had half a chance. I believe the summer will be the making of him."

"Now, dear children, all those who want to be missionaries and help poor little Willie, hold

up their hands. One—two—that's it, dear, put it 'way up!—three, four, five, six, seven, eight, and your dear teacher does, too. That makes nine, does n't it? Why, we all want to be kind to poor little Willie! Yes, yes, no cross words for little Willie—never, never! Now let us sing the new hymn that we learned last week, 'Kind Words Can Never Die.'"

The boys howled with laughter, as Lefty commenced to sing the ancient melody, and the Trust adjourned in hilarious spirits.

Thus was William Langley Ainsworth, Junior, voted into the party of campers, which now was complete.

CHAPTER VII

THE EXODUS

"DO you realize that school closes three weeks from to-morrow, and we have n't bought a single thing yet for the camp?" Tom asked suddenly, looking up from his books one night, when the twins were at work on their lessons.

"That's so!" Tad agreed, elevating his fountain-pen and gazing at the ceiling. "What do we need?"

"Dishes, cots, cooking things, a stove, an icecream freezer—oh! lots of things."

"Most likely, you'll get up there and then find that you've overlooked something that you're sure to need the worst way—like pins or matches."

"We'd better put things down as we think of 'em, and then take a day off on Saturday for a shopping trip."

"That's a good idea! We'll invite Cousin 117

Willie to take us around in the auto, if the folks are not going to use it. That 'll save carfare and tickle him to pieces. Besides, if he 's going to be a Beaver Camper, he 's got to get used to chipping in with his mite, even if, as in this case, it happens to be an automobile.'

"I wonder if any of the fellows can go with us," Tom went on. "I don't like to take the responsibility of buying all the equipment."

"Most of 'em will be working on Saturday. Lefty has a game on in the afternoon. Walter Cornwall is going out of town to see his grand-mother in the fond hope that she 'll make a contribution toward his expenses. Who is there to go?"

"There does n't seem to be anybody left, Tad. Well, the fellows can tell us what they want, and we'll try to get it. We'll invite them to go with us on the shopping trip, too, and then if they don't accept our kind invitation it won't do for them to make a kick afterward."

Tad agreed that this would be a prudent course to follow, so the Trust held an extraordinary session in the school basement on the following afternoon. Tom explained the pur-

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pose of the assembly, and invited his fellow-campers-to-be to go with himself and his brother on their proposed shopping trip. As he had anticipated, various good reasons were given to excuse the others from going. Lefty made a partial promise to lend the inspiration of his presence, but he could not be more definite at that time.

"Well, we can't put it off any longer, fellows," Tom declared. "We ought to order everything on Saturday, because it'll be shipped by freight, most likely, and you never can tell when it will get there. If you don't help to buy the stuff, we won't expect you to make any kicks when you see what has been bought. Now the question is, what do we want?"

"A steam yacht," Lefty promptly suggested.

"Chase yourself!" cried Jack. "Tom means, what do we need, not what do we want."

"Is there anything up there in the way of equipment?" Walter asked.

"Nothing but two rowboats and the oars."

"Let's commence with breakfast, and go right through the day," Lefty suggested. "Knives, forks, spoons, oatmeal bowls, pitch-

ers, plates, cups, saucers, napkin rings, muffin rings, breakfast bell rings—"

"Hold on! hold on a minute!" Tom begged.
"I've put down two sizes of plates, cups and saucers, bowls (big and little), platters, knives, forks, spoons, tablespoons, coffee pot, pitchers, salt and pepper shakers, frying-pan, baking pan, pancake turner, two sizes round pans, and pails—quart pails and water pails."

"I should think they would pale at that list," Lefty commented. "No napkin rings, or finger bowls, or bread-and-butter plates—"

"You'll need something to heat water in," Eliot Fernard interrupted, ignoring Lefty's complaint. "Of course, you could use one of the iron pails, if you are getting that kind, but don't you think a wash-boiler might come in handy?"

Tom nodded, and added this article to his list.

"I don't suppose there is a laundry on the next block to the camp, is there?" Charlie Hayes inquired innocently.

He was promptly informed that the nearest institution of the kind was far removed from the camp site.

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"Well, then, you 'd better take along a couple of irons. Some of the fellows may get fussy, and want to do some washing and ironing."

"Why not go into the business, Charlie?" Edgar asked. "Mrs. Charlie O'Hayes, shirts executed at short notice. Once tried, always used. The old reliable!"

But Charlie could not be persuaded to enter this profession.

"How many hammocks have we in the crowd?" Bert asked.

An inventory revealed one.

"Better get a couple of good ones, extra strong," he advised. "They re not very expensive, and we 'll be glad we have 'em lots of times. See if we re not."

"Bert has got his mind on the moonlight nights," Lefty remarked slyly. "How about baseball supplies? Are we pretty well stocked up?"

Every one began talking at the same time in response to these questions, but out of the babel of tongues it was possible to learn that every camper possessed a glove of some sort, and there were a dozen bats available, as well as a catcher's mask, mitt, and chest protector.

"We need some baseballs," Lefty announced. "Better buy 'em here, had n't we? Suppose each fellow gets one and brings it along. We'll have enough then, and it'll save a little of the camp money. We don't want to spend any more of that than we 're absolutely obliged to."

"Well, is there anything else we need in the way of dishes and kitchen supplies?" Tom inquired. "Let's get that settled before we go wandering off into other things."

"Did you say you had a can-opener on your list, Tom?" Eliot asked.

"No, I forgot that. We're sure to need one."

"Yes, it's easier to open a convention than a can, if you don't have a can-opener," Lefty declared. "We need one of those things, also a corkscrew and an ax. That's a good combination—if the can-opener and the corkscrew fail, just use the ax. Let's see! You have n't any tools on your list, Tom, have you? We'll need a hammer, a screw-driver, a saw, a monkey-wrench, a gimlet, and a chisel. We can't very well get along without these. In fact, we could use a few more very comfortably,

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but I guess we can manage with the few that I just mentioned."

"Who is going to cook?" Jack wanted to know.

"We'll take turns," Tom informed him. "Ten fellows, ten weeks—each one will be cook for a week."

"Well, when I'm cook, you'll get pancakes for breakfast, because I know how to make them," Jack responded. "Have you got a griddle? Just think of being right up in the maple syrup country and having pancakes for breakfast."

"Huh! Don't fool yourself with happy dreams," Bert Halsey advised cynically. "You'll probably find that all the 'pure Vermont maple syrup' has been sent to market, and you'll have to put up with something no better than what you can buy at the corner store."

"You wait and see," Jack retorted, with faith unshaken. "Now then, for one thing, I like mashed potatoes. Have you got a potato masher? We need a chopping bowl and a meat chopper, too, and when I 'm cook I want a quart measure. Far be it from me to guess how much

a pint is, or a half-pint. I'd surely spoil something, and it'll be cheaper to buy a measure."

Tom nodded, and added these articles to his list.

"What are you going to use for a rollingpin?" was the next question.

"Oh, do we need one of those things?" Tom responded.

"Might as well tack it on," Tad replied.
"Of course, you could use a clean bottle or a can that had n't been opened. You could get along without a potato masher, and use a frying-pan instead of a griddle, but what's the use? The cost of these things won't break us, and we'll be a lot more comfortable. It strikes me that we need lanterns, too, and a big ladle will come in handy. I suppose we might be real dressy and have a few wash-basins in our boudoir, even if there is one over a hundred miles long, right in our front yard."

"Not all of it!" Lefty protested. "It would make the said front yard a bit moist."

"Better have a strainer, too," Eliot suggested, "and—how about the dishes, Tom?

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Are you going to have 'em wiped after they 're washed, or just let nature take its course?''

"Oh, I suppose it won't do to let them dry any old way," Tom replied. "We'll need some dish towels, won't we?"

He entered this item on his list, then added soap, matches, an ice-cream freezer, and rock salt, as they were suggested. Then the assembly entered upon a discussion of the stove question.

"I should n't think we'd need a stove," Lefty observed. "An iron stove weighs about a ton, an oil stove smokes, and the oil can is sure to leak. Besides, there is the expense of your kerosene. A gas range would be handy, I expect, but where would we get the gas?"

"You can cook anything you want over the right kind of camp-fire," Bert added. "There's no use bothering with a stove. Wilbur will show you how to coax a fire to do 'most anything, and we can build a shelter around it to keep out the wind and rain."

"That will be the cheapest way," Tom said approvingly. "It will save the expense of a stove, and our fuel won't cost us anything.

There's plenty of wood on the place, and we have the right to use all of it that we really need. That goes with the place."

"I should think the owner might manage to throw in something, considering the rent we re paying. Did Wilbur send you a list of the medicines and things to take along?"

Tom nodded, and proceeded to read it, but this sturdy, healthy group found little interest in such matters, and some one interrupted to ask if it would be necessary to buy tents.

"What kind of building is this bungalow?" Eliot wanted to know, when the tent question was under consideration.

"Why, it's about forty feet long and twenty wide. There's a broad piazza in front, and the entrance to the place is just about in the middle, if the rough sketch Mr. Raymond sent me is right. You go in the door, and on the right is the living-room. This is a big place, half the size of the bungalow, with a large stone fireplace in the corner. There are three rooms on the other side of the hall. One has been used as a dining-room, another as a kitchen, and the third as a small storeroom. When Mr. Raymond occupied the place, they used the cot-

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tage back of the bungalow for a kind of dormitory. That 's the reason there are no sleeping rooms arranged in the bungalow."

"Well, what 's the matter with sleeping on the piazza when it 's clear, and moving inside when a storm strikes us?" Eliot continued. "I don't believe that we need to spend a lot of money for tents. We 'd better have some mosquito netting, though. Most likely, we 'll need it," and the others heartily endorsed the suggestion.

"We ought to be patriotic and have a flag," Jack observed, "and you always need things like rope and twine and string."

"I knew we needed heaps of things, but I never should have thought of some that you fellows have mentioned."

"There are a lot more that we have n't mentioned," Lefty chuckled. "Needles and pins, and such things. We'll have to organize a sewing society, I expect, after we get to camp."

"I'll bring along my football," Charlie promised, "and we'll need things like tennis racquets and fishing tackle. Who owns a camera?"

"I have a little Brownie," Walter replied.
"I'll bring it. We'll have a good many chances for pictures, and I can develop and print them right up there. I've got all the stuff."

"I suppose I'd better take my mandolin along," Tad remarked, "and games will come in handy on rainy days. Let's gather in those that are lying around at home."

"If you're thinking of exploring the country, a good road map will help," Edgar observed, "and these little pocket drinking cups are good things to have along. We need a clock, too, for the bungalow—an alarm-clock to wake up the cook in time for breakfast."

"That's right," Tom agreed, "and we ought to have a mirror and a calendar. Now about the food—"

"Here's where it gets interesting," Lefty observed.

After a brief discussion, it was decided to buy certain dry groceries like rice, flour, and sugar, in the city, and make arrangements for fruit, vegetables, milk, and butter after their arrival.

They also decided to buy a supply of cots at 128

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two dollars each, of a pattern which Tom had seen and strongly recommended. Then the conference adjourned rather hastily, for some of the boys already were late for certain appointments which had been made for the afternoon.

The twins found that both Cousin Willie and his father's automobile were at liberty on Saturday morning, and both were "loaned" to the Trust with hearty good will, to the end that the shopping trip might be made quickly, comfortably and without expense for carfare.

Lefty had no engagement until three in the afternoon, when he was scheduled to deliver sundry curves for the benefit of a local baseball team. He had partly promised to accompany the twins on this trip of inspection and investment, and, when he learned of the means of transportation which had been furnished, he was quite willing to become a member of the party. Promptly at half-past eight on Saturday morning, he appeared at the Townsend home, where the twins were waiting for Cousin Willie and the auto.

"Is Cousin Willie a careful driver?" he in-

quired innocently, after he had saluted the twins.

"Oh, why he does n't run the car!" gasped Tom. "They have a chauffeur."

"I feel greatly relieved," Lefty exclaimed with a comical gesture indicating that a weight of anxiety had been lifted. "Can the chauffeur run Cousin Willie, too?"

"He doesn't try," laughed Tad. "It's easier to run the auto. Some one outside is tooting a horn. Look out of the window, Tom, and see if they've arrived."

They had, so the three boys hurried outside. Close beside the curb stood a large, black touring car. In the tonneau sat Cousin Willie. He was small for his age, and under-developed. His face was pale, his expression rather indifferent, and, as he looked about him, his manner strongly conveyed the impression of languid indolence.

"Do my eyes behold Cousin Willie?" Lefty inquired in a low tone.

"Yes, that 's the little dear," Tad whispered, pausing half-way down the steps. "Is n't he a peach? Come on out and get introduced."

"He may be a peach," Lefty muttered to

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himself, "but to my eyes, he looks like a half-ripe gooseberry."

They called a cheerful "good-by" to Mrs. Townsend who was watching from the basement window, then stepped inside the car.

"Lefty, let me introduce my cousin, Will Ainsworth," Tad commenced, after saluting the younger boy. "Will, this is my friend, Alexander Beckley."

"Named after Alexander the Great, and several other Alexanders not so great," Lefty added, as he shook hands. "I'm glad to know you, Will. I've often heard your cousins speak of you."

Cousin Willie murmured something, and looked rather suspiciously at the big, goodnatured fellow. He wondered how far it would be safe to take his words seriously.

"Where do you want to go?" he asked abruptly, turning toward the twins.

"We'd better order the cots, first thing," Tom replied, "because the store where I saw them is right on our way downtown." He turned and gave the necessary directions to the chauffeur.

They rolled smoothly along over asphalted 131

streets, and presently the car came to a stop before the entrance of a large furniture store.

"Now for some cots," Tom said briskly, as befitted the managing director of a busy trust, and he led the way toward the open doorway. Passing through the store to the rear, they entered an elevator and soon found themselves on an upper floor, where a bewildering array of cots and beds of all kinds saluted their eyes. A salesman approached the party before the elevator door had closed behind them, and Tom made known their wants.

"Here is a good, strong cot, with four heavy legs," the salesman announced, drawing one out for inspection.

"Only four legs?" Lefty asked in surprise. "Why, I saw one the other day with six legs on it."

"Indeed!" the salesman exclaimed, opening his eyes wider in astonishment. "I never heard of that pattern."

"Fact! Four legs underneath, fellow with two legs on top," Lefty solemnly assured him.

"You take him away and make him behave, Tad," begged Tom. "I would n't have brought

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him if I had known how much suffering he was going to cause."

Tad obligingly led the offender a few yards away, and they talked together in a low tone.

"Do you suppose that cot can stand up on its hind legs and bark?" Lefty inquired with a little chuckle. "We'd better tell Tom not to take it unless it can. And look, Tad, they haven't put the stuffing in right. It's all bunched up at one end, and the rest is lower."

"That 's a pillow, you boob!"

"Is it? What's it for, Tad? I thought pillows were for pillow-fights, and you can't very well pick up a whole cot and throw it around when you want to sling a pillow. I'm going over to persuade Tom to buy some other kind."

"Not on your life! You're going to stay right here and behave yourself."

"Oh, look, Tad! The pretty cot can fold its little legs under it. Is n't that cute? Why, it 's a regular folding bed! I wonder if that 's a habit. Let me go, Tad. I want to tell Tom not to buy one like that for me. Think how embarrassing it would be for the cot to fold up

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its legs and lie down right in the middle of the night."

"We'll fix yours so that it won't play such a trick on you."

"The man's writing down the order now. Look! He's getting excited. He put his pencil in his mouth three times while I counted ten. I hope he sends those things on time. Would n't it be awful if we all had to sleep in the ice-cream freezer because we had no other furniture?"

They watched Tom and made mischievous comments as he completed the transaction and gave careful shipping instructions to the salesman. Then they joined the youthful purchasing agent and Cousin Willie, and went back to the waiting automobile.

"You got fooled that time, worthy Thomas," Lefty informed him, shaking his head ominously. "That man told you those cots had heavy legs."

"Well, so they have."

"Huh! You don't call those heavy, do you? Why, you ought to see the legs on our piano at home. Really, Tom, I assure you they 're much heavier than the ones on the cot."

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And then Cousin Willie laughed.

The next stop was made at a department store, and the party invaded the basement in search of furnishings.

"We'd like to look at some ice-cream freezers, please," Tom announced, addressing the trim saleswoman in charge of that department.

"Those with the hand-organ attachment that play a tune while you turn the handle," Lefty explained.

"Don't mind him," Tom said in a low tone. "He's perfectly harmless. That young man with him is his keeper."

The saleswoman looked at Lefty with very apparent pity, as she proceeded to display several varieties of the desired article, and he felt too completely overcome to venture any comments. Tom finally selected one that was lavishly guaranteed and with which a book of recipes was given. Then the party moved down the aisle.

"We may as well get our screws, nails, nuts, and bolts while we re down here," Tom observed, as he consulted his list.

"What 's the use of buying nuts?" Lefty in-

quired. "Is n't there a nut tree on the camp property?"

"You 're nutty yourself," Tom declared, and then they turned their attention toward the hardware department.

The entire morning and much of the afternoon was spent in ordering supplies for the camp. Cousin Willie was quite bewildered, and said but little. He seemed to enjoy the novel experience, however, and even went so far as to laugh at some of Lefty's humorous comments, which caused that youth to confide to Tad that "there was much hope for Cousin Willie, because any one who laughed at his jokes was sure to have good in him, somewhere."

The simple grocery list suggested a somewhat restricted menu, and this troubled Cousin Willie every time he thought of it. Still, he made no complaint and offered no suggestions. Lefty privately formed the opinion that the boy was not going to be as much of a nuisance as he had anticipated.

Finally, the shopping came to an end, although further purchases were made on the days that intervened between that time and

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the eventful moment of departure. Tom felt qualified to act as purchasing agent of a much larger trust before he finished his task, because responsibility sat more heavily upon him than upon the happy-go-lucky Tad, who worked early and late to assist his brother. Indeed, Tom felt quite ready for a vacation when the time arrived.

The last busy days were close at hand. Examinations came, with all their vague menace, but the boys met them bravely and managed to win passing marks in the various studies. True, some of the percentages might have been higher, but, as Tad remarked philosophically, "What's the dif whether we jumped through or crawled through? We got through, did n't we? And it looks just the same on the other side."

Finally, the last bag was packed, the last farewell spoken, and the moment of departure arrived—that time to which the boys had so eagerly looked forward during the months of toil and rigorous self-denial.

They were to proceed by the night boat to Troy, then by train to Westport, here taking

a small boat which would convey the party to the camp wharf.

It was a merry company. School days, work days, days of limitation and sacrifice were behind, and before them stretched the long-awaited vacation days, which their several imaginations filled with all manner of fun and happy outdoor life.

CHAPTER VIII

SETTING UP HOUSEKEEPING

WARNING! DO NOT LAND HERE!

THIS sign in oily, sticky black paint presented a hospitable welcome to the boys as they stepped from the little launch which had brought them across the lake to the camp landing. The words were painted upon a rough board which previously had been whitewashed, and this was nailed to a tree close by the landing.

"See that, Tom?" Jack cried. "It says we must n't land here."

"Does it? Well, we don't believe in signs. Yank it down, Jacko!"

"The paint is n't dry yet," Jack announced, as he tore the sign off the tree. "Now, who the dickens put that thing up?"

"There 's one thing you can't blame on me,"
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Tad reminded them. "I never set eyes on the place until just now."

"Never mind! I'm hungry!" Lefty exclaimed impatiently. "Let's eat first, and find out later what dub stuck up the sign."

"Anything in the house to eat, Tom?" sighed Edgar, changing his suit-case to his left hand, and gazing sorrowfully at the long path that wound among the trees toward the bungalow.

"Why, yes! I think so. There 's a man up here—Samuelson, his name is—who lives about a mile up the road. He agreed to haul our stuff over from the station and stow it in the bungalow. He has the keys to the place. Mr. Raymond, the owner, left them with him, so I was told."

"Wow!" groaned Bert. "Do we have to go after 'em?"

"Glory! I hope not!" Tom gasped, dropping his blanket-roll as the horrible thought crossed his mind. "I should hope the old geezer would have sense enough to leave 'em around here somewhere."

"How do you know he's an old geezer?"
Walter demanded. "Maybe he's young, and handsome as a big sunflower."

"Maybe!" Tom agreed. "I won't argue the point. I'll call him blessed if only he left those keys where we can find them easily."

The party had reached the bungalow now. It was a long, one-story structure, with a shingled roof. Olive green paint, with trimmings of a darker shade, adorned the walls and spacious piazza, and a hardy rosebush climbed over an arched trellis by the steps.

Jack dropped his baggage when the house was reached, bounded up the steps, rushed across the piazza, and halted before the door. To this entrance, a scrap of paper was tacked, and Jack glanced at it and turned quickly.

"Hurrah!" he shouted. "The keys are under the mat."

"That 's all very well," Eliot retorted, close behind him, "but where 's the mat?"

"That's so!" Jack exclaimed in dismay. "Where is it? Alas, that we should reach the border of the promised land only to perish with hunger."

The boys crowded about the door, and examined the little piece of paper which bore the ancient and much-ridiculed sentence, "The keys are under the mat."

Charlie walked over to a window and peered within, shading his eyes with one hand.

"Ah! I see beefsteaks, watermelons, pies, ice cream—" he began to mutter.

"Poor Charlie!" murmured Lefty. "Hunger's affected his brain. He's going batty!"

"Will we have to go 'way up to that man's house to get the keys?" Cousin Willie queried plaintively.

"It looks that way," Tad sighed gloomily, kicking an inoffensive post. "Unless we can break a window and get in so-fashion."

Doctor Halsey appeared on the scene then, having been detained to settle with the boatmen.

"Well, well, what's the matter?" he exclaimed. "Is every one trying to avoid the honor of being the first to enter our manse? Never mind! I'll settle it by going in myself."

He walked up to the door, turned the handle, and pushed it open. It creaked a bit as the hinges performed an unaccustomed duty, but swung open without any other resistance. A piece of rag carpet lay in the hall, and he raised one end and took from beneath a small bunch of keys tied together with string.

"Well, did you ever see such a pack of chumps?" gasped Tom. "Here we ve been standing around taking it for granted that the bloomin' door was locked, and never so much as turning the knob to find out."

"I thought Jack tried it in the first place and found it locked," Eliot stated, "so I did n't bother. Well, anyhow, we re in! Ah, this is some class, all right. We seem to have struck a comfortable place."

"But where is all our truck?" Tom cried in dismay. "All our food, the cots, our trunks and baggage—I don't see a thing."

They made a hasty trip through the rooms, peering into closets, and up on shelves, but not a box or a barrel could be found.

"Perhaps they re in the ice-house," the doctor suggested. "Neighbor Samuelson may have thought they would keep better on the ice."

The boys dashed across the clearing, and unlocked the door of this square building, now nearly full of large ice cakes. Nothing had been put in here since the ice was packed, so they descended in force upon a small, three-room cabin on the camp property. Dust and

cobwebs adorned the interior—but nothing more, except the two boats that were leased with the camp.

"Well, would n't that bump you?" Lefty demanded, sitting down helplessly and looking around.

Probably it would and did, for no one entered a denial.

It was not surprising that the boys felt depressed and perplexed. They had traveled all night on one of the great steamboats that sails up and down the Hudson River, connecting the metropolis with the capital city and its across-the-river neighbor, Troy. The trip had been delightful, but novel to most of the boys; and the excitement of the journey combined with the unaccustomed experience of trying to sleep in state-rooms had kept the mythical sandman at bay, and none of them had slept much.

They had carried light luncheons from home to save the expense of an evening meal on board the boat, and had eaten a simple breakfast while the boat slowly advanced from Albany to Troy.

Then came a ride of several hours in a hot,

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dusty railroad coach, and finally a sail in a puffing motor boat that left them "right at their front gate," as Charlie remarked.

Their various articles of equipment, and the provisions ordered in the city had been shipped nearly two weeks previous, while their personal baggage, which went by express, had been sent in plenty of time to insure delivery before their arrival at camp.

It was evident that neighbor Samuelson had been on the premises, for the note on the door and the keys under the mat betrayed his presence. Then, too, there were ruts made by wagon-wheels in front of the bungalow, but where—oh, where!—were their possessions?

"Hark!" Bert cried suddenly. "I hear voices! Girls' voices!"

They peered eagerly through the screen of trees, and there, as close to the shore as it could come, was a canoe. Two "maidens fair to see" grasped the paddles and kept the light craft moving, but, had a rock been before them, it is much to be feared that a collision would have resulted, for both girls were looking landward with undisguised interest.

"Oh, you-oo!" cried the irrepressible Lefty.

The girls appeared startled. Perhaps they suspected that their scrutiny of the premises was unobserved. At any rate, they abruptly changed the course of their canoe, and turned their backs upon the watching boys.

"Good-by, girls. Come again!" Lefty called after them.

When this temporary diversion had passed from the realm of immediate interest, the boys remembered how hungry and tired they were.

"Why, oh, why did I come out here in the wilderness to starve?" Tad wailed. "I could have starved at home and saved traveling expenses."

"You could, but you would n't," Tom retorted. "I can see you starving to death with a refrigerator and a cake-box handy."

"Why, Thomas Townsend! Your insinuations are unworthy! You know I never eat cake or anything fancy, and never, never touch food between meals. I'm on the training table."

"A lot you are! If you didn't say so, I can assure you that no one ever would notice it."

"Your conversation is highly entertaining, 146

gentlemen," Jack observed, "but it does n't bring us any nearer to dinner."

"I don't see any way out of the tangle except to forage upon our neighbors," Doctor Halsey announced. "What's the advantage of having neighbors if you can't make use of them once in a while? Of course, we must n't expect too much. It is n't at all likely that any one around here can feed eleven hungry people without previous notice, but perhaps we can buy enough bread and butter to keep us from starving."

"Tis well said!" Eliot declared. "Let us get on the trail of these juicy articles."

"I'm not going," Cousin Willie announced with a sigh. "I feel tired."

"All right, kid! You stay here and hold the bungalow down," Lefty responded goodnaturedly, "but don't wander off into the woods, because a crocodile might get you. They have affectionate dispositions, and are especially fond of small boys."

"I don't want to stay here all alone," whined Cousin Willie.

"'Man wants but little here below,' Sweetness," Lefty quoted cheerily, "and that little

he doesn't often get. Come along, you fellows! We ought to have been there and back by this time."

They started for the road that wound back through the woods, connecting the camp property with the main highway. Cousin Willie was left behind, sulking in pettish discontent on the piazza of the bungalow.

"How far is it to our nearest neighbors?" Charlie asked, when they were in sight of the main road.

"Oh, about three miles or so," Tom carelessly responded, with cheerful exaggeration.

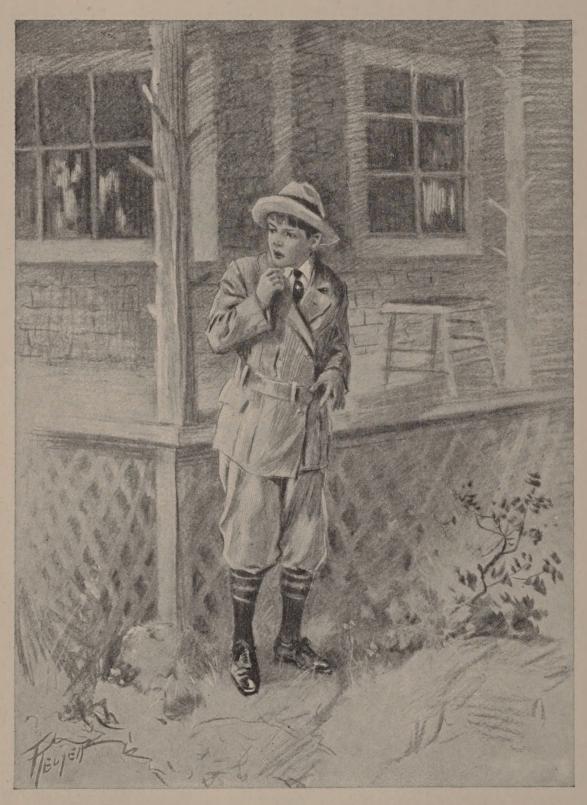
"What? Three miles! O-o-o-oh!" A chorus of dismal groans expressed the feelings of the boys.

"I'm so hungry, honestly I could eat the bark of a tree," Edgar declared.

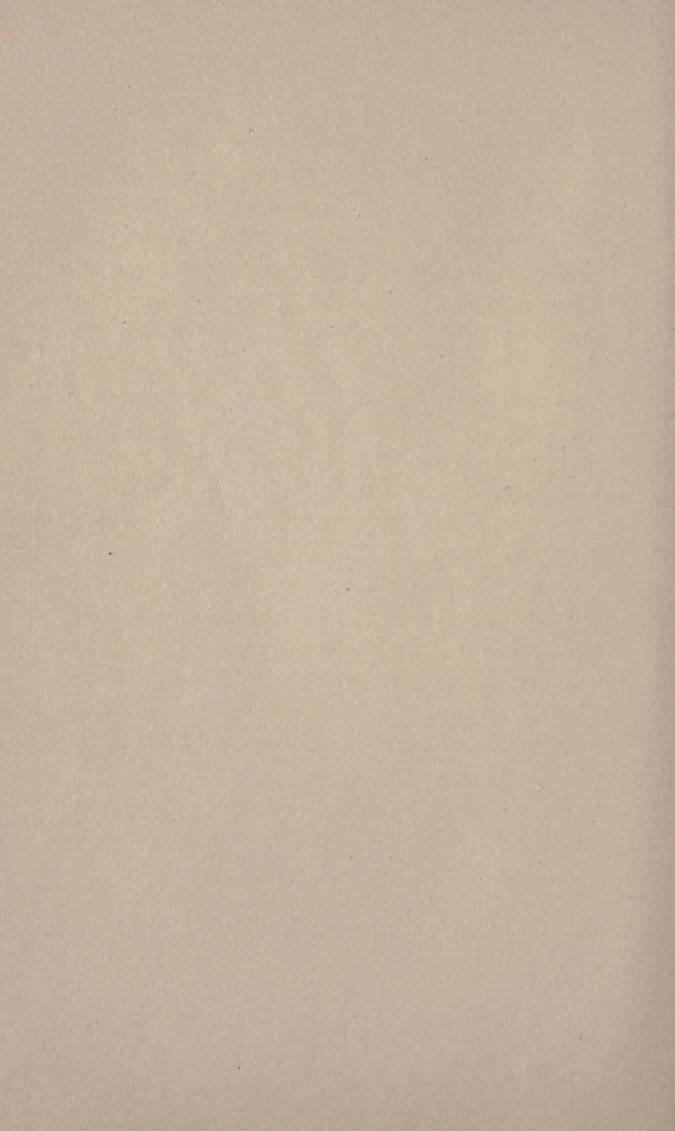
"Don't do that, because most likely it would spoil the tree," Tad warned him. "I heard a dog bark a little while ago. Why not start on that?"

They had reached the road now, and halted in perplexity, hardly knowing whether to turn northward or in the opposite direction.

Just then, a carriage drawn by a well148



"I don't want to stay here all alone," whined Cousin Willie



groomed team appeared in the distance. As it came nearer, the boys discovered that it was a comfortable phaeton driven by a woman whose pleasant face was crowned with an aureole of white hair. With her was a young girl of fourteen or fifteen who tried to appear unconscious of the group by the roadside, although it was evident that her curiosity was deeply stirred.

Doctor Halsey stepped forward and removed his hat. A gentle pressure upon the reins halted the team, and the lady turned toward him inquiringly.

"I trust you will pardon me for stopping you," he began, "but we are strangers here, and want to find the nearest neighbor who can supply us with food. We reached our camp about an hour ago, expecting to find our provisions there. We can't see a single thing, though, anywhere around, so our cupboard is in worse condition, if possible, than that of old Mother Hubbard."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" was the compassionate reply. "Have you leased the camp yonder—Mr. Raymond's?"

"Yes, ma'am."

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"Then we are your nearest neighbors by water, although Mr.—er—there is some one about the same distance from your camp on land. Now let me see. What can I do for you? Why, yes! We have plenty of soup in the house, and bread. Fortunately, we baked a fresh batch this morning. This is not very much, to be sure, but in an emergency like this it may be better than nothing."

"Indeed, yes!" exclaimed the doctor gratefully, striving to show no more eagerness than the limits of propriety permitted, yet vastly relieved by the welcome offer of neighborly hospitality. "It certainly is very kind of you to suggest such an easy way to end our troubles, and yet I dislike to trouble you."

"Ton't speak of it," was the prompt reply. "It really is no trouble—'just add hot water and serve,' you know," and she concluded with a merry laugh.

"We certainly shall be under great obligation to you," Doctor Halsey assured her, "and we appreciate not only your hospitality but the neighborly spirit in which it is offered."

The lady in the phaeton received this gallant 152

acknowledgment with a gracious bow and a smile. "If you will excuse me, I'll drive on and get things ready," she said. "You will find our landing about half a mile up the lake, the next one to yours. If you come by land, look on the left side of the road for a mail-box with my name on it—Mrs. Elizabeth Spencer."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Spencer," Doctor Halsey responded. "One of the boys is staying back at the bungalow, so there will be eleven in the party, altogether. I hope some day we may have an opportunity of repaying your great kindness."

Mrs. Spencer nodded pleasantly and started the horses. "Come up and sing for me sometimes, and we'll call the account settled," she said, as the carriage began to move. "I do enjoy young voices. I hope we shall be real good neighbors."

"Saved!" muttered Lefty. "Ah! I can almost smell that soup."

"Smelling does n't help an empty tummy much," Tad grunted. "Alas! to think that we should be reduced to singing for a dinner."

"Well, singing for a dinner is better than crying for it," the doctor reminded him.

"Come on, you fellows! Let's make ourselves as presentable as possible and get started."

"I wonder if that girl is Mrs. Spencer's daughter?" Lefty remarked.

"What girl?"

"What girl! As if you didn't notice that girl in the carriage. Why, you were looking right at her most of the time."

"Why, the very idea! I looked at—er—the horses and the carriage and Mrs. Spencer and—and—the harness. Was there a girl in the rig?"

"Was there! Well, I guess yes! Believe me, she was some looker, too. I hope she's around when they feed us."

They went back to the bungalow, where Cousin Willie was taking a nap in the midst of suit-cases and bags, and removed the marks of recent travel as well as their limited resources permitted. Then they started for what Lefty called "the soup-kitchen of Lady Bountiful."

It was nearly a mile by the road, but finally they located the mail-box with Mrs. Spencer's name on it. Then, in single file, they walked along a narrow path until a velvety lawn ap-

peared. Across this, circled a gravel driveway that led them up to a pretty white cottage with green blinds.

Upon the shady porch, shielded from the sun by awnings and climbing vines, sat the girl who had been in the carriage, and three others. All were dressed daintily in light-colored frocks, quite as if they had been expecting company. A sudden shyness seized the boys, and they felt a strange reluctance to advance. Some one on the porch giggled just then, and that increased their embarrassment. Then one of the girls disappeared within the house, and in a minute Mrs. Spencer came out to welcome them.

"I know you will be willing to take things just as you find them," she said, half jestingly, half seriously. "A hungry man is not critical, anyhow, for which I am truly thankful. I'm only sorry that we can do so little for you."

While Mrs. Spencer talked, she had led the party inside the house, and now they were in the dining-room. The soup was on the table, steaming hot, and it seemed to the hungry boys as if nothing ever had tasted quite so good. Also, it possessed the additional advantage of

being very filling—so much so that the boys were surprised to discover how quickly their keen appetites were satisfied.

Mrs. Spencer proved a most kind and gracious hostess and before the campers left her cottage they felt as if they had known her a long while. When the meal was over, Doctor Halsey excused the boys and himself, reminding their hostess of the great amount of work that awaited them. Then, with many heartfelt expressions of gratitude, they prepared to depart.

"Mrs. Spencer, can you tell me where to find Mr. Samuelson?" Tom inquired. "He was to have carted our stuff over from the railroad station at North Rutland, and I want to hunt him up, and see what 's become of it."

Mrs. Spencer hesitated. "You'd better not go there—yet," she said finally. "You can inquire at the North Rutland freight office and find out whether your goods were delivered, but I would n't let any one know, if I were you, that I'd had any dealings with Mr. Samuelson."

The boys looked surprised, so she added, by way of partial explanation, "This will seem

like very strange advice, no doubt, but I assure you that it is the best that I can give. I earnestly hope we all may understand the matter clearly, before the summer passes."

Wondering, yet not caring to question further, the party left their kind friend and walked back to Beaver Camp, discussing with eager curiosity the strange affair partly revealed by Mrs. Spencer's guarded warning. They had not yet settled upon any definite plan of campaign when they turned into the camp road, though suggestions were being offered very freely.

All at once, Eliot stopped short, and gazed with eager interest at the underbrush growing near the camp road. "It looks to me as if some one had been dragging a big box or something else large and heavy through those bushes," he said, pointing toward the left. "See how the ground is scratched and torn up. Look at the broken branches and the leaves scattered around. Suppose we investigate."

They plunged into the underbrush, and within ten yards found a trunk. Walter Cornwall set up a shout of joy and eagerly inspected the property to see if it had been damaged in

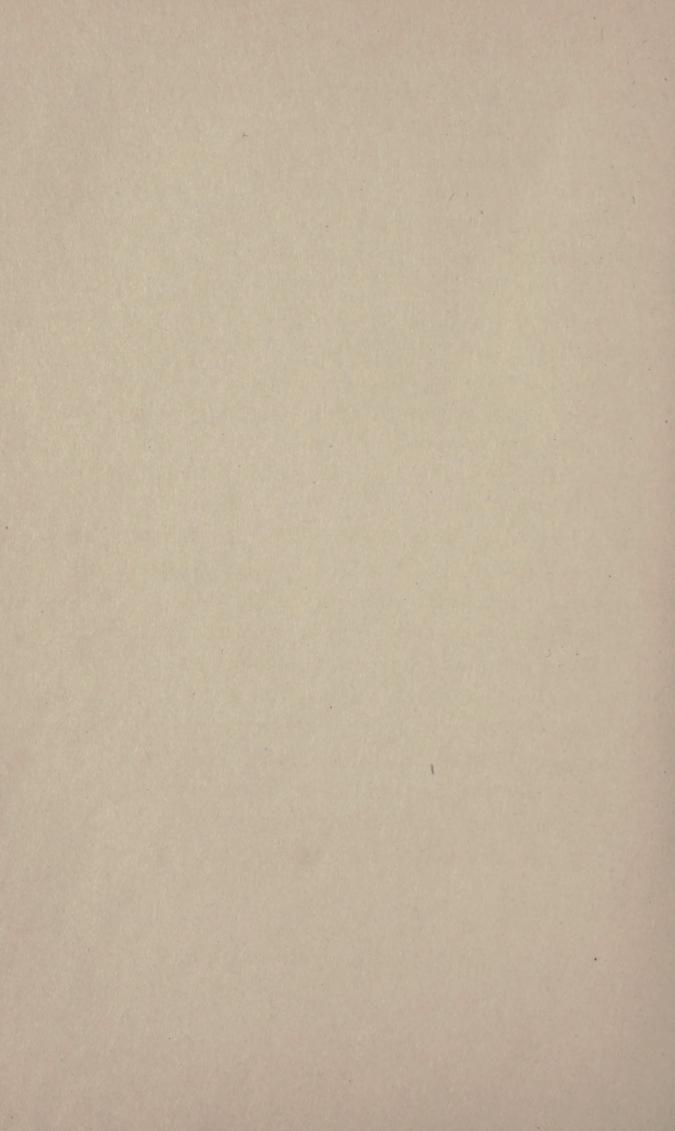
transit. Further in among the trees and the bushes was the ice-cream freezer, packed full of smaller articles; and scattered about were boxes, barrels, trunks, and bundles. Apparently, everything was there except the cots, a trunk belonging to Jack, and the smaller one of Cousin Willie's. (He had brought two in order to carry what his mother believed essential to his comfort at camp.)

"Well, I wish whoever dumped this stuff out here in the wilderness would kindly tell us how to get it back," muttered Tom, who nevertheless was vastly relieved to know that so much of their equipment had arrived. "I don't see how we're going to drag all these things up to the bungalow."

"We ought to have brought a wheelbarrow with us," Tad remarked. "Those barrels and the big boxes weigh about a ton. If only we had a next-door neighbor who really lived within a respectable distance of us we might send Willie up to borrow his wheelbarrow"—
[Cousin Willie looked startled as this suggestion was made] "but the sweet joy of living way off from everybody puts things right up



The discovery in the underbrush



to us. We'll have to tackle this thing ourselves, I suppose."

Lefty tested his strength on the largest box. "Say! I can't lift this thing!" he exclaimed. "If that 's the case, how are we going to carry it from here to the bungalow?"

"I'm afraid we'll have to unpack all our stuff, and carry it up a little at a time," Doctor Halsey said thoughtfully. "That will be a long, tiresome job, but you fellows will strain yourselves if you attempt to carry the heavier cases and barrels."

"Prepare for the slaughter!" cried Lefty. "Where 's the ax?"

"Hold on a minute!" Eliot said slowly, seating himself on a box and looking about him in some perplexity. "It looks to me as if this stuff had been left up at the bungalow all right. Whoever stowed it away locked the door and put the keys outside under the mat. Some one came along, read the sign, opened the door, dragged out all the stuff and left it here. Then they put the mat and keys inside the hall, and left the sign on the door just to fool us."

"All of which is very interesting, but what 's

it got to do with getting this stuff back under the ancestral roof?" Edgar wanted to know.

"Why, just this!" Eliot informed him. "How do you suppose these things got here? They didn't walk out and lie down. They could n't have been carried by hand. Whoever put 'em here must have used a stone boat or a wheelbarrow. If they'd had any charity left in their make-up, I think they'd have left the chariot around so 's to give us a lift in getting the stuff back again. Let 's look and see if we can find anything that looks good."

The boys were disposed to give this suggestion an enthusiastic welcome, and immediately the search commenced. It was only a fraction of a minute later when Charlie raised a shout, and the others, hurrying to his side, found an overturned wheelbarrow in a dense tangle of underbrush. Tacked to its side was a sign, reading:

DANGER! DO NOT TOUCH!

The letters looked as if they might have been formed by the hand that painted the inhospitable sign at the landing.

"Huh! Well, I just guess we will touch it, all right!" Tom declared, and he seized the handles with sudden force and dragged the wheelbarrow out of its place of concealment.

"Somebody around here has a grudge against us," Charlie observed. "I wonder who it is."

"Let him beware!" Lefty exclaimed dramatically. "When we have time, we will fasten ourselves to his trail and make him repent in ashcloth and sashes."

"You mean sackcloth and ashes," Eliot informed him.

"Is n't it pleasant to have somebody around who knows what you mean so much better than you do yourself!" Lefty sighed with the air of a martyr.

"Say, you fellows, just bury the hatchet and get busy on this stuff," the doctor called, as he struggled with a barrel.

"Aye, aye, Captain," Lefty responded, and he sprang to the assistance of the camp director. Then the tedious, back-breaking process of transferring all this varied assortment of freight and baggage was undertaken. Although twilight lingered long for their ac-

commodation, it was dark before they had finished unpacking.

"Light the lantern, Bert!" Lefty called. "I can't see over here."

- "Say please."
- "Please."
- "Will you always love me if I do?"
- "Sure! Hurry up!"
- "I'd be charmed to oblige you, but we have n't any oil."
- "There are candles in that second barrel over in the corner," Tom announced, pointing with the frying-pan.

"Hurray! Who has a match? Thank you! Now for a candle. Ah! Behold the grand illumination of our palace."

While the boys busied themselves unpacking the things, Doctor Halsey fried some bacon and made "camp flapjacks" which the boys pronounced "great." Even Cousin Willie seemed to relish this simple fare, so vastly different from that to which he was accustomed. The evening meal was informal to the last degree, the bungalow being in a state of wild disorder, but the boys made the best of a situation that could not be dodged, and there were no com-

plaints beyond a few grumbling remarks made in a spirit of fun.

Nine o'clock came—half-past—still the work was not done.

"Say, I'm dead tired," Jack announced finally. "Let's quit."

"I second the motion," the doctor added, dropping his hammer with a weary sigh. "We have a whole summer before us, so there is no special reason for trying to do all the work tonight."

"So say we all of us," Tom responded. "Tad, just ring for the porter, and tell him to make up our berths."

"That reminds me, where shall we sleep?"
Charlie asked in a dismayed tone.

"'Go forth into the open sky and list to Nature's teaching," Jack quoted. "We can sleep under the guardian stars."

"You will be more likely to sleep under difficulties, I'm thinking," Bert responded. "Fortunately, it's warm and clear to-night, so I suppose we may as well curl up on the piazza and make ourselves as uncomfortable as possible."

"We could have cut some boughs and made 165

camp beds," the doctor observed, "but we 've been so busy that, somehow, it was crowded out. I'm sorry I didn't think of it before. We might have let a few things hold over until to-morrow for the sake of being comfortable on our first night in camp."

"Well, I don't believe any of us are very fussy just now," Lefty remarked. "I know that if you put it up to me whether I'd sleep on boards or go out and cut boughs, I'd say, 'Boards, please, and the sooner the better."

"That's the way I feel, too," Tom added.
"We can spread out some of this packing stuff,
and make the most of our supply of blankets.
I guess we can worry along for one night."

And they did. Wrapping themselves in blankets and pillowing their heads on sweaters or anything soft that came handy, they drifted off to dream of the delights of camping and the joy of communing with nature which such a life affords.

The doctor slept in the middle of the long line, with five boys on each side. Lefty found himself on one end, with Cousin Willie next, between himself and Tad.

The boys were very tired, and soon fell asleep

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in spite of their hard beds which afforded slight comfort for aching muscles.

About an hour later, Lefty stirred uneasily, then rolled over seeking a more comfortable position. As he did so, he was conscious of a sound like a stifled sob from his next neighbor.

He smiled scornfully. What was the kid blubbering about, anyhow? Then Lefty's kind heart reproached him. After all, he was only a little fellow, and this was the first time he had been so far away from home without his mother. Come to think of it, this was Lefty's first experience under such conditions, and the more he thought about it the more uncomfortable he felt. How lonesome the night was—just the splashing of the water, the chirping of the crickets, and the sighing of the wind through the trees. Lefty did not remember that he ever had noticed how mournful these sounds were. No wonder the poor kid felt homesick.

Lefty rolled over quietly, and put his arm protectingly around the younger boy.

"What's the matter, kid?" he asked gently.

At first, no response came from the sobbing boy, but at length his tale of woe was told. He

was so lonesome and tired (he did not say homesick) that he could not go to sleep, and yet he did not want the other campers to know it for fear they would think him a baby. Lefty smiled when this statement fell falteringly from Willie's lips, and he was thankful that the darkness concealed his expression of amusement.

He soothed and comforted as best he could this unhappy boy who was so anxious to get on well with his fellow-campers and have them think favorably of him.

"It won't be nearly as hard to-morrow, Willie," he whispered. "By that time, you'll be so happy that the vacation won't seem long enough. You must n't feel badly, either, when the fellows tease you, because you'll notice that we make fun of one another every day. It's a sign they like you if they sort of jolly you along. If they're down on you, they'll let you beautifully alone."

To this comforting counsel, Willie gave a faltering agreement.

"Suppose we form a partnership, you and I," Lefty went on, in response to a sudden impulse. "You want the fellows to think that

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you've quit being a kid. That's good! That's the proper spirit! If you're really on the level, I'll stand by you and help all I can, but I'll expect you to do your part. I'll begin now by telling you to forget everything and go to sleep."

"All right—partner," Cousin Willie murmured drowsily.

When the doctor awoke, soon after sunrise, and looked over the more or less still forms ranged on either side of him, he saw the partners fast asleep, with Lefty's arm thrown protectingly around the junior member of the firm. This tableau pleased the camp director, and he smiled contentedly, as he thought of the promise of development for Cousin Willie which it suggested.

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CHAPTER IX

"HOIST THE FLAG! THE GIRLS ARE COMING!"

MANY duties awaited the boys on that first morning in camp, and they were stirring before the sun had climbed very high in the eastern sky. Doctor Halsey paired them off and set them at work doing the different things that needed attention. One pair cut wood and piled it near the camp-fire; another carried groceries into the room which had served the former occupants as a kitchen, and arranged them conveniently on the shelves; a third finished unpacking the boxes and barrels; another swept out the rubbish, aired the blankets, and made the premises tidy, while the last two boys carried water, washed dishes and cooking utensils that had just come out of boxes and barrels, and aided in the preparation of breakfast.

During the morning, Tom and the doctor arranged for a supply of milk, eggs, butter, and

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vegetables from a farmer in the neighborhood, while Jack and Eliot rowed across the lake to purchase some necessary articles. While they were gone, Tad and Lefty walked over to the railway station at North Rutland, where they found the two trunks that had not yet been delivered, but no cots.

"Whatever has become of those bally beds?"
Tad exclaimed helplessly.

"I wanted to warn Tom not to buy 'em," Lefty reminded him, "but you would n't let me. I knew something 'd happen to 'em."

"Maybe the railroad is using them. They have sleepers, you know."

"Sure! Maybe they 've used them for part of the road-bed."

"No. I know what, Lefty. Don't you remember the salesman said the legs could be folded underneath? They probably got tired, curled up their legs, and went to sleep."

"Well, anyhow, I wish they'd come. The piazza floor may be swell for rugged constitutions, but there are things I like better."

"We won't sleep there to-night, you can bank on that! We 'll cut branches and make some camp beds. I read an article not long ago

that told how to do it. Maybe the doctor knows a better way. He's had lots of experience in such things."

"Perhaps they 'll come to-morrow. There 's a freight up from the south every morning. I wonder if we could coax some one here to cart them over to camp and bring the trunks at the same time."

"I should n't be surprised. I 'll ask the supreme potentate of freight and baggage."

That official "guessed 'Zeke Pettingill'd bring the stuff over for 'em if he had a load that way," and directed them toward the humble home of the worthy Ezekiel.

As they turned away from the office, they became suddenly aware that three boys of a typically bucolic variety were regarding them attentively from the top rail of a near-by fence.

"Mornin'," one of them ventured diffidently.

Lefty removed his hat and bowed low.

"Greetings," he responded.

That stunned the trio into speechlessness, and it was not until Tad and Lefty had moved some yards away that the previous speaker again found his voice.

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"Reckon you fellows play ball," he suggested tentatively.

"Reckon we do!" Lefty responded with much animation, as he wheeled around and stepped toward the speaker. "Want a game?"

The boy nodded. "Be you the fellows that 'r' stayin' over on the lake?"

"We be—but not all of them. There are eight more."

"Campin' on the Raymond place, ain't ye?"

"Well, we 're making a feeble stab in that direction."

The natives exchanged glances of ominous solemnity, and sighed in a manner which somehow suggested the idea of awe, apprehension, and gloomy foreboding, all at once.

"Reckon ye won't stay there long," one of the natives predicted. "There ain't a fellow in the whole township that 'd go near the place after dark. They say there 's awful goin's on at night, and somethin' always happens to folks that stay there."

"I 've noticed it already," Lefty solemnly assured them. "Last night, along about twelve o'clock—the switching hour of midnight—I

heard a queer noise out in the woods. It was a wild, mournful sound"—he shivered as he recalled the experience, noting the fact, as he paused, that his auditors were visibly impressed—"like—a man playing a bass viol in a cave. I seized the first weapon that came handy, which turned out to be a can-opener, and went forth to discover the cause. I stole silently into the woods, and what do you think I saw? A red, white, and blue elephant, with gleaming tusks and a steamer trunk. He was sitting on a log, playing the banjo, and singing, 'Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground.' Oh, yes! There's no doubt about the place being haunted."

"Wal, I swan!" ejaculated one of the boys, and all three stared at Lefty with feelings too deep for utterance.

"We 'll be real glad to arrange a game or a series of games the next time we 're over," Tad assured them hastily. "Come on, Lefty! We want to hunt up the great and only 'Zekiel, and get him to bring our things over to us. It is n't a whole lot of fun to tramp out here every day, only to find that there 's nothing doing."

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They located Neighbor Pettingill without trouble and made favorable arrangements with him. Then the merry pair turned back toward Beaver Camp.

"Well, Tad, we seem to have landed kneedeep in an awful mystery," Lefty remarked. "We 've hired a haunted camp, and discovered a man that we don't dare to talk about when any one is around. Our goods and chattels are swiped and hidden. Signs appear in unexpected places. The plot thickens. I thought Tom said this was such a quiet section of country up here."

"I believe he did say something like that, and we swallowed it like dutiful children. I wonder what he thinks now."

"That 's hard to tell! Do you suppose those fellows can play baseball enough to keep themselves warm?"

Tad shrugged his shoulders doubtfully. "You never can tell about these country teams, Lefty. They may be able to play rings around us. Most likely they play together a lot and have a bunch of heavy hitters on board. It is n't a good plan to underestimate a team like that. If you do get walloped, it makes you

feel like a three-cent piece with a hole in it."

Lefty nodded thoughtfully and remained silent for a moment. Then he laughed as he said, "Won't it make the fellows' eyes stick out when we tell 'em they 've struck a haunted camp? We'll work that idea for all it's worth, Tad, and if you and I can't have some fun out of it on the side, it'll be a wonder."

"Cousin Willie 'll have fourteen fits when he hears about it," Tad answered. "He 'll be afraid of his own shadow."

"Oh, don't fret about Cousin Willie! The kid 's got the right stuff in him, Tad. I had a talk with him last night, and he and I have agreed to form a partnership for—er—for mutual improvement and development."

"That's fine, Lefty! A partnership like that ought to do you lots of good. I'm so glad, for your sake, that Cousin Willie has consented to improve you. You need it! Of course, I should n't say so to any one outside, but since you mentioned it—"

"Exactly! Cousin Willie has the right idea about camp life, Tad, and I don't believe he 's going to give up very easily, no matter what happens. At home, I suppose he 's humored

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and petted to death, so he's grown to expect that sort of thing. He knows that he can have his own way if he fights for it, and consequently he rules the roost.

"The kid has sense enough, though, to realize that a program like that is n't likely to draw a crowd up here. He's a sensible youngster in some respects. I don't know where he gets his common-sense notions—"

"They come from our branch of the family,"
Tad hastened to assure him.

"A lot they do! You 'd have to give trading stamps to get anybody to take 'em. Well, anyhow, Cousin Willie has made up his mind that it 's time he quit being a kid. He wants to show the fellows up here that he has just as much backbone as any one, and that he 's just as big in feelings as they are. I told him that I 'd stretch forth a helping hand to aid a stumbling brother, as long as he acted as if he really meant what he said."

"Good work, Lefty! I didn't think the kid had it in him, honestly I didn't! I hope he 'll make good. It would tickle Mother immensely if he should develop as she wants him to, up here at camp."

Arriving at Beaver Camp, the fun-loving pair lost no time in proclaiming the fact that intelligent natives had declared the place to be haunted, but the announcement excited only amusement and ridicule, although made in a highly sensational manner and with dramatic effect.

The campers, however, welcomed the invitation to meet the natives in friendly rivalry on the baseball diamond, and immediately began to discuss ways and means of accomplishing their defeat.

"The first thing on the program will be a lot of hard work getting the diamond into condition," Tom declared. "If we play in the village, those fellows may ask for a return game here. Anyhow, we need plenty of practice, for we want to make a good showing."

"Probably we'll be able to tackle our great athletic field by to-morrow," Charlie observed. "We seem to have things in pretty good shape around the place."

And it was agreed that this matter should receive attention on the day following.

By mid-afternoon, the campers were comfortably settled in their new quarters, and they

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celebrated the release from hard toil by having an invigorating swim in the lake.

Cousin Willie stood timidly on the bank, after having waded in until his ankles were covered, shivering at the thought of plunging into the cold water.

"Let's duck the kid," Bert proposed to Lefty.

"Don't you do it—now," was the pleading response. "He 's only a kid you know, Bert, and if you go to work and scare him into fits the first time he comes down to swim, he won't get over it in a hurry. What 's the use, anyhow? We want to brace him up! Most likely he 'll enjoy it as well as any of us, when once he gets that habit. If he sees that we 're not going to bother him, he won't be afraid to come in."

"All right, deacon," Bert laughingly replied.
"I'll help make a water baby of him."

He waded ashore as he spoke, and stood for a moment beside the younger boy, swinging his arms as he waited in order to keep warm.

- "Can you swim, Willie?" he asked finally.
- "A little."
- "Better come in. The water's fine to-day.

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Honest! It does n't feel cold after you've been in a while, and it's a lot more fun to be in than to stand here shivering like a frozen turnip. Come on in with me. It is n't deep until—until you get out there where Ed and Tad are."

Willie drew back, reluctant to plunge in, but Bert threw an arm around his waist and lifted him into the deeper water where they both splashed about gaily for a few minutes. Then Bert swam off to join the others and Willie essayed a few strokes himself.

"Not bad, Will," the doctor cried from the shore. "Kick your legs more. That's it, that's the way," and he waded out to encourage the boy with a few suggestions and a little praise.

Cousin Willie was very happy when the signal was given to come ashore. He began to feel a strong liking for these lively, fun-loving, manly fellows, who seemed to take especial pains to be kind to him. New forces stirred within his heart, and it seemed to him as if he were just beginning to be a real boy. All this served to strengthen certain commendable resolutions which he had made, and which had

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been partially revealed to Lefty on the night previous, when the partnership was formed.

The campers lingered on the beach to sun themselves, in spite of the doctor's warning of possible sunburn. Then they dressed leisurely, and wandered up toward the bungalow.

A dismal wailing, which reminded them of backyard fences at home, saluted their ears as they approached the house, and the boys at the head of the procession hurried forward to investigate. No cat had been on the premises since their arrival, so they wondered whence came the unmistakably feline solo.

"A cat!" Charlie gasped, as he halted in front of the piazza. "In a cage, too! Well, did you ever!"

The others crowded around, and saw a small Maltese kitten imprisoned in a rough cage made of a crate. On this was tacked a sign bearing in red ink an inscription which read as follows:

DANGER! DO NOT TOUCH! WILDCAT CAPTURED IN THE WOODS ON THE RAYMOND PLACE. MANY MORE AT LIBERTY! BEWARE!

The kitten had a piece of red ribbon tied around its neck, and a little bell tinkled when it moved.

"Must belong to some one in the neighborhood," Tom remarked. "We'd better hang on to it until it's claimed."

"I wonder how it got into the crate," Edgar said in a puzzled tone.

"Through the crater, most likely," Tad promptly informed him, and there was a chorus of groans.

The Beaver Campers indulged in considerable speculation as to how and by whom the kitten had been placed on the bungalow piazza, but other matters claimed their attention, and they were too busy to attempt a complete solution of the mystery.

A large flag was owned by Beaver Camp, and Tom, with the help of Eliot and Charlie, attempted to attach it to halyards on a flagpole near a corner of the bungalow. This required some little time, and they had just completed the task when Bert came running up the pathway from the shore.

"Hoist the flag!" he cried breathlessly, as he neared the house. "The girls are coming!"

CHAPTER X

AN INHABITANT OF IVY-CLAD RUINS

"WHAT girls?" Tom inquired, looking calmly at the excited messenger.

"I think it's the same pair that we saw yesterday in the canoe. They're headed for our landing."

"All right! We 'll run up the flag. You 'd better hustle down and act as a reception committee. They 'll need a guide if they come ashore."

Bert nodded, and hurried back toward the landing, arriving just in time to see a canoe swing around in a quarter-circle and come alongside. In it were two of the girls who had been sitting on Mrs. Spencer's piazza when the Beaver Campers arrived for their first meal on the previous day.

"Excuse me for troubling you," one of them said, blushing a bit. "We have lost a little Maltese kitten that we are very fond of. If

you see it around anywhere, will you please catch it and return it to us? We are Mrs. Spencer's nieces and are staying with her."

"Why—why—I think we have your cat up at the bungalow," Bert informed them, and his embarrassment can be excused when it is recalled how the cat arrived. "We found it there a little while ago when we came back from our swim. Does n't it wear a red ribbon around its neck and a bell?"

"Oh, yes!" the girls cried together. "That must be Cjax."

"Cjax?" questioned Bert, forgetting his embarrassment in his surprise.

The girls laughed at his evident astonishment. "We have four kittens," one of them explained, "and we named them Ajax, Bjax, Cjax, and Djax."

"But how can you tell which is which?" Bert inquired. "I should think you'd be calling Ajax Djax and Cjax Bjax."

"Oh, no! They have different markings, and we can always tell them apart. It is real funny, though, to hear people get them all mixed up when they talk about them."

"Won't you come ashore?" Bert asked po-

litely, remembering his duty as a reception committee of one. "Or would you rather stay in the canoe and have me bring—er—'jax down to you."

The girls looked at each other a little uncertainly. Then one of them said, "We 'd better go up and get Cjax, Dorothy. He may run away again if some one brings him down to us, and then, you know, we don't want to trouble any one when it 's not necessary."

Bert helped them to step up on the landing, then lifted the canoe out of the water, and placed it on the boards. The girls thanked him with well-bred courtesy, and walked with him along the winding path toward the bungalow.

Bert was fervently hoping that the girls might not discover the manner in which Cjax had been delivered to the inhabitants of Beaver Camp, but, alas! a long-drawn wail smote the air as the girls approached the bungalow, and they exclaimed sympathetically. A moment later, they discovered their pet in strange quarters.

"That's just the way we found it," Bert explained, fearing that they might think the Beaver Campers guilty of cruelty to animals.

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"We thought it was a pet and believed that some one would claim it soon. That's the reason we kept it in the crate. We were afraid it would run away if we let it out."

Eliot appeared on the scene just then, carrying a hammer, and it was the work of but a moment to liberate the imprisoned kitten.

"Poor Cjax!" murmured the girl addressed as Dorothy. "I wonder who shut you up in that thing."

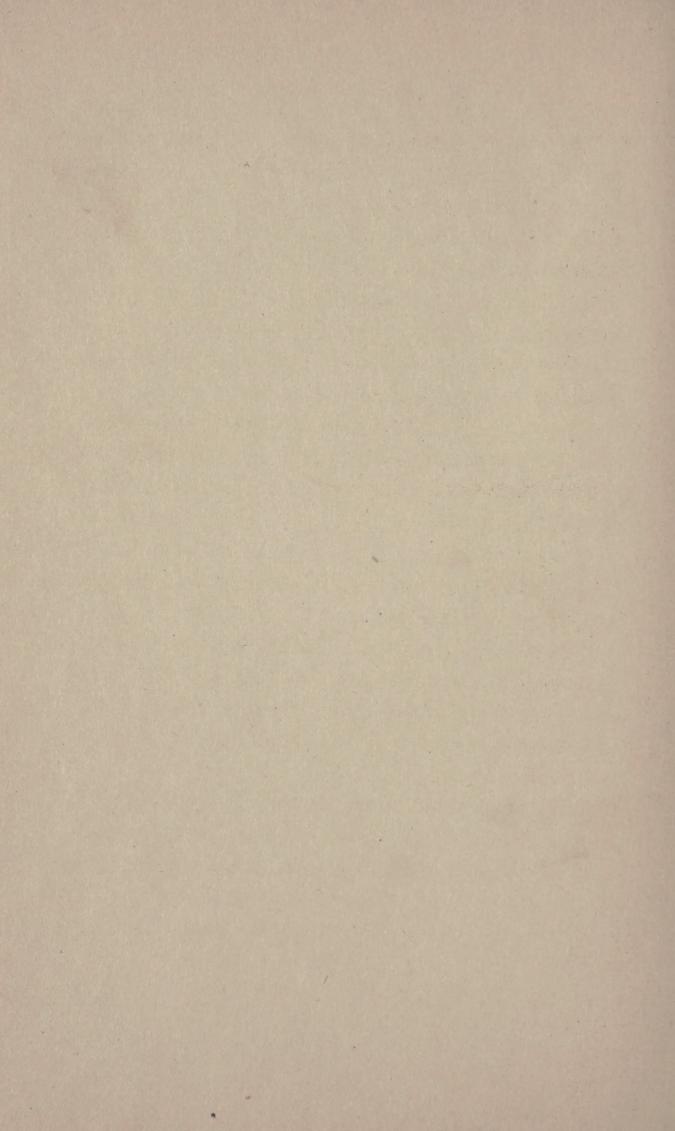
"Just what we've been trying to puzzle out," Bert assured her.

Then he told the girls of the sign which had saluted their arrival, of the mysterious removal of their possessions, and of the inscription which adorned the wheelbarrow. He did not add that Beaver Camp was reputed to be haunted, for he secretly hoped that this might not be the last visit of the girls, and feared that such news would frighten them away from the place.

The girls promised to let the campers know if they learned anything that might throw light on the case, and then said that they would have to hurry back in order to reach home before supper.



They discovered their pet in strange quarters



All the boys except Edgar and Charlie, who were getting supper ready, escorted them down to the landing and helped them to embark. Cjax did not like the looks of the water and seemed determined to remain in Dorothy's arms, but, as it is hardly possible to hold a kitten and manage a paddle at the same time, Cjax was deposited on the bottom of the canoe, which now was headed for home.

He soon scrambled to his feet, clutched the side of the canoe, and looked over the edge toward the boys, meowing vigorously. Bert waved his hand.

"Good-by, Cjax!" he cried.

But really he was thinking less of the cat than of—of—other things.

"Nice girls, those!" Jack commented. "I hope we'll know them better before the summer's over. I dare say they'd make bully good company if a fellow was well acquainted with them."

Walter nodded absent-mindedly. "They 're not a bit stiff," he added. "Just pleasant and polite, but not silly or fresh. These girls that act as if they had n't any sense make me tired."

"I guess you're tired pretty often; are n't

you, Walter?" Tad asked slyly. "A lot of girls now are full of airs, and silly as all get out."

"That 's true enough," Tom declared. "If they only knew how much fun was made of them, they would n't think themselves quite so stunning. These two girls were placed in a pretty embarrassing position, coming ashore here among a lot of strange fellows. Yet they carried themselves well, and didn't do anything foolish. You can see that they're well-bred."

All unconscious of these compliments, the girls continued on their homeward way, arriving safely in time for Cjax to enjoy the evening meal in the felicitous feline fellowship of Ajax, Bjax, and Djax.

About the same time, in Beaver Camp, the boys were assembling to sample the specimens of camp fare which the amateur cooks provided.

"This business of sprawling around here on the grass to eat is highly informal, no doubt," Bert remarked, "but what are you going to do when it rains?"

"We must build some sort of shelter around 190

our fire," the doctor replied. "In fact, we'd better have two fires—one for cooking purposes in the rear of the bungalow, with a protection over it and a wind-shield; another, out in the open, to be lighted after dark for warmth and cheer. On stormy nights, we'll kindle a fire over in the big fireplace in the corner of the assembly room."

"Yes, that 's all right, but how about us?"
Bert persisted. "I was n't worrying about the fire. When it rains, where 'll we eat?"

"Oh, we'll take our meals inside," Tom told him.

"You generally take 'em inside, don't you?"
Lefty chuckled. "How about a dining-room table and chairs?"

"We can make a table out of those boxes that our stuff came in," Eliot suggested.

"Sure!" Tad agreed heartily. "Every time we want to make it bigger we 'll just add a box. Then it will be a kind of multiplication table. But if you sit on the floor and eat off a box, don't you think it will be a trifle awkward? Don't let me discourage you at all. I'm willing to sit on the box and eat off the floor if it gets to be stylish up here. I only mention the

matter because it is very close to my heart," and he concluded with a comical flourish which drew howls of merriment from the others.

"There's a sawmill over in North Rutland,"
Tom observed. "Why not get some planed boards and make a few benches? Neighbor Pettingill can bring'em over with the cots and trunks."

"We ought to have something to sit on," Bert asserted vigorously. "We may have visitors some time, and you would n't want to ask them to sit on a trunk or a barrel."

"That's right!" Lefty agreed. "Mr. Cjax Cat may call."

"I was n't thinking of Cjax," Bert protested. Finally it was agreed that some one should visit North Rutland on the day following, and order enough lumber to make several benches for the comfort and convenience of the campers and their possible guests.

The cots had not arrived at nine o'clock, so the party sought the comparative comfort of the camp beds laid out on the floor of the piazza. The night was warm and still. There was no moon, and the dark shadows of the woods seemed to shut the bungalow in on every side.

Edgar Sherman did not know how long he had been asleep when suddenly he opened his eyes and looked about him with a vague consciousness that something was amiss. Perhaps a muscle had become cramped; perhaps an unusual noise had disturbed his slumber; perhaps a bad dream had aroused him. Whatever the cause, he awoke with a start, then raised himself on one elbow, and looked over the piazza. As far as he could see, each camper was in his place. Some were sleeping quietly, others were restless and perhaps uncomfortable, but all were visibly and quite audibly asleep.

Then he sat up to survey the grounds. Nothing unusual here, except—what was that light, gleaming for an instant along the path to the lake, then becoming invisible only to shine forth again? It must be a lightning-bug, but no! the fireflies darted hither and thither, and, by contrast, their glowing lights were dim. What could it mean?

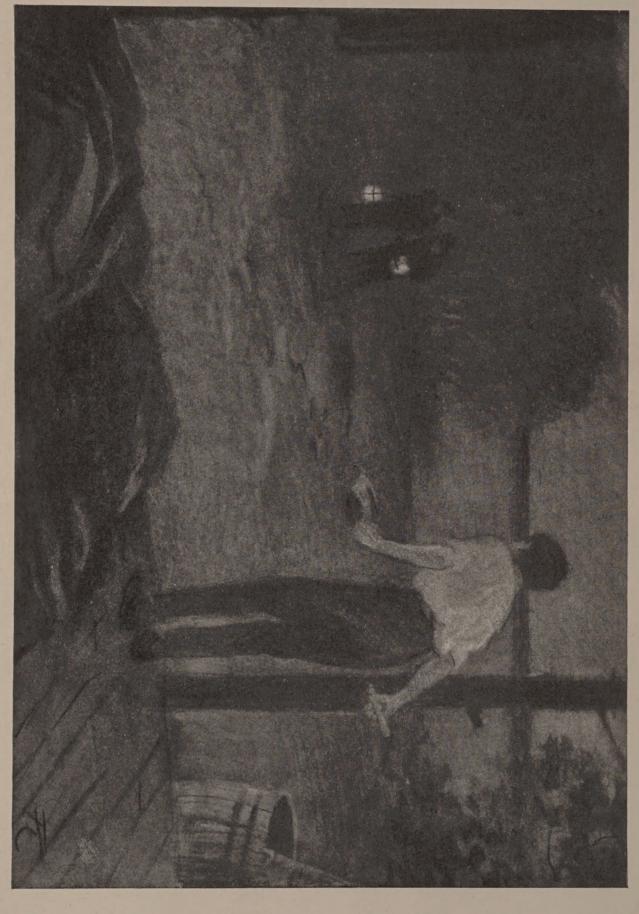
He crept to the end of the piazza, and peered into the dark shadows beyond. Involuntarily, he gasped in astonishment. There, beyond the bungalow, was another light so much like the

first that it might have been a duplicate. It gleamed and signaled from the dense blackness of the woods near the camp road.

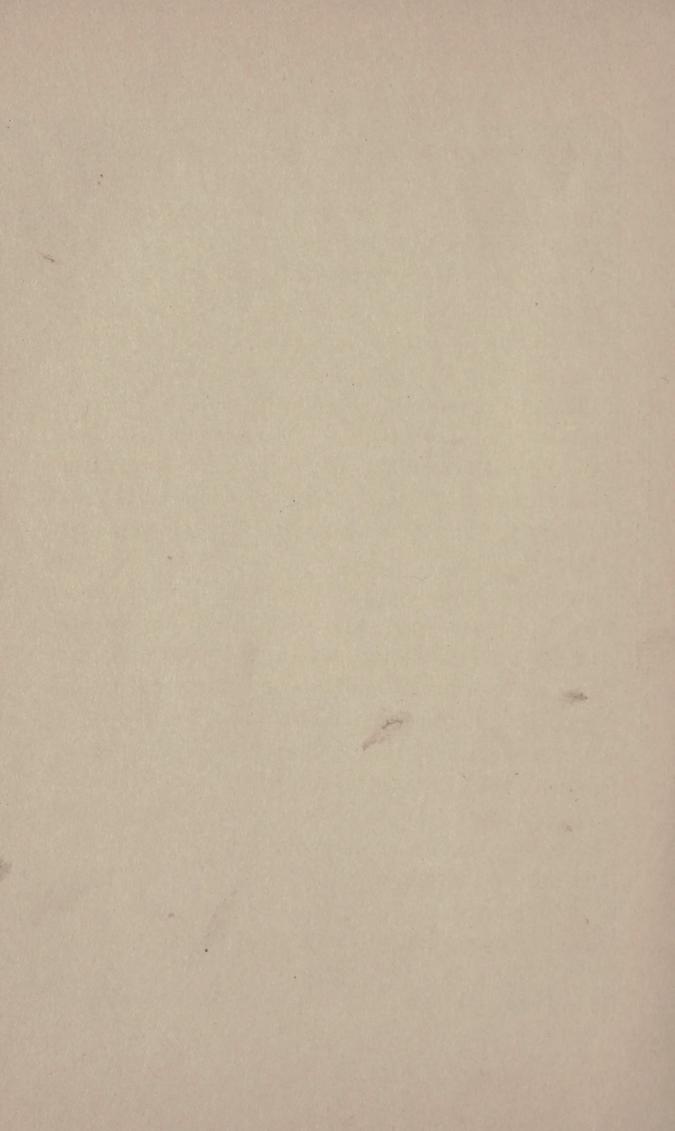
For a minute, Edgar was paralyzed with bewilderment by the uncanny swinging of these strange signal-lights. Then a novel plan suddenly suggested itself to him, and he quietly disappeared inside the house.

Hurrying through the hall and out the back door, he found that a pile of glowing embers still remained in the trench dug for the campfire. A few of these he hastily transferred to a small pan, using two pieces of wood as a pair of tongs. He stopped in the bungalow only long enough to grasp a couple of objects shaped like small cylinders, then returned to the piazza. Yes, the two lights could still be seen. Now they were drawing closer together and nearer to the bungalow. Onward they came, slowly, uncertainly, nearer, ever nearer. Now stealthy footsteps could be heard; now a cautious whisper reached Edgar's ears; now the lights stopped, less than ten yards away.

Edgar held one of the cylinders over the pan, close to the red-hot coals. Then, rising quickly, he hurled it toward the lights.



Yes, the two lights could still be seen



There was a sudden, sharp explosion, two distinct cries of terror, a crash and a sound of breaking glass. Then the intruders could be heard retreating in great haste.

The explosion rudely awakened the campers, and Edgar was surrounded by an excited group of blanket-clad forms, all talking and questioning at once. He told them of the invasion of their premises, of his discovery of the intruders, of his suddenly formed plan to discomfit them, and of its noisy and successful culmination. Some of the boys had purchased a few fireworks to celebrate the approaching Fourth of July. Edgar knew where the firecrackers had been placed for safe-keeping, and, in this emergency, had thought of borrowing one to hurl at the trespassers. In the stillness, the explosion had sounded like the bursting of a bomb. Little wonder that the intruders were so terrified that they fled at top speed, leaving behind them a broken lantern.

Of course, the camp was thoroughly awake now, and excited comments fell from the lips of one and another of the boys.

"You say that one came up from the lake, Ed?" cried Lefty. "Let's have a lantern.

I'll go down and investigate if somebody'll come along. Who'll go with me?"

No one cared to volunteer. The shock of sudden awakening and the sensational news, graphically and excitedly told by Edgar, had stricken them with the paralysis of panic, just for the moment. Suddenly, a voice cried:

"I 'll go with you, Lefty!"

The boys were dumfounded. It was Cousin Willie.

"All right, kid! Put on your shoes and come along."

Some one had brought a lantern, and this was passed to Lefty without delay. Another camper furnished a match, and then the light gleamed forth, revealing, it must be confessed, some rather frightened expressions of countenance. Waiting only long enough to slip on their shoes, and to wrap their blankets about them, Lefty and Cousin Willie hurried out into the darkness. Then the younger boy discovered that he had his right foot in his left shoe and right shoe on his left foot, but he was too greatly excited to pay much attention to the discomfort.

They made as little noise as possible and kept

close together as they hurried down the path, now stumbling over some obstruction, now colliding with a tree when they failed to notice a turn in the path, but always keeping steadily on, until, finally, they stood on the landing.

Lefty flashed the lantern around, but there was only one thing that betrayed the presence of the marine division of the invaders. To one of the little posts on the landing, a piece of rope still was tied. Inspection of the end showed that it had been cut with a sharp knife.

"He 's gone, Willie!" Lefty cried. "Listen! maybe we can hear something."

Faintly over the water, came a sound of splashing oars, growing ever more distant.

"Hm-m-m! That man can't get away fast enough!" Lefty chuckled. Then, turning toward his junior partner, he said in a tone of genuine admiration, "Say, kid, you had your nerve with you, all right, to come down here with me in the dark. I noticed that none of the others were exactly enthusiastic about coming."

"The doctor would have come, most likely," Willie made answer, "only he did n't know we

were going. He and Tad were looking for that other man—the one who came over from the camp road."

Lefty could hear Willie's teeth chattering now, and his voice trembled as he formed the words, though he tried hard to control it.

"Well, you get the credit, anyhow," Lefty observed. "I think you deserve promotion, kid. Hereafter, I'm not going to call you Willie or Cousin Willie. From this time forward, I christen thee Bill."

Cousin Willie was so greatly overcome that his terror was banished and he gasped in pleased surprise. This honor meant more to him just then than a doctor's degree, and he felt well repaid for forcing himself to appear courageous at a time when he really was quaking with fear.

"Do you mean it, Lefty?" cried the delighted boy. "Will you really call me Bill? I'd like it ever so much if you would, but I'm afraid I was n't very brave, after all. I was awfully scared coming down here."

"You can't help getting scared sometimes, Bill, but a gritty fellow will pull himself together

and do what he thinks ought to be done, whether he 's scared stiff or not."

"You said you'd stick to me, Lefty, and I was n't going to have you come down here all alone when I could risk it as well as you."

"Bully for you, Bill! You've made a fine start! You've got all the fellows sitting up and taking notice. Keep up the good work, and you'll surprise yourself. See if you don't!"

And the boy mentally resolved that he would.

Returning to the bungalow, the pair reported the discovery of the rope, and this added a new theme of discussion to the chronicle of the invasion.

There was little more sleep in Beaver Camp that night, but the sun rose early and made the restless period of waiting seem shorter. As soon as it was light enough, the boys explored the grounds, hoping to find some further clue to the identity of their unbidden guests, but nothing suspicious could be discovered, except a broken lantern.

The bright sunshine and the quiet, peaceful atmosphere of early morning in a measure calmed their fears, and they allowed themselves to be persuaded that the intruders had come

with a purpose mischievous rather than malicious. They fancied that possibly the parties responsible for the peculiar appearance of Cjax might have returned to regain the cat and play some further trick on the unsuspecting campers. At any rate, the headlong, precipitate flight of the trespassers proved that they were badly frightened, and the boys believed that they would not soon venture upon property so vigilantly guarded and so noisily protected.

This was the day that had been set apart for work on the athletic field, and, after an early breakfast, the transformation was attempted. It was an ambitious undertaking to convert a rough clearing into a baseball diamond, with possibilities of basketball, tennis, and a running track; but the boys were determined to overcome the natural obstacles, and this seemed to assure success.

It was hard work—digging, leveling, removing rocks and stones, cutting down bushes, and trying with a sickle to get rid of the tall grass. They were glad to stop at half-past ten, and plunge into the lake to cool off, and to gain rest and refreshment from the change in exercise.

IVY-CLAD RUINS

They went to work again after dinner, for it seemed as if only a beginning had been made during the morning. Tad and Lefty were excused from further toil, having announced their intention of visiting the sawmill at North Rutland in order to purchase lumber for the benches.

"It's hot here in the sun," Lefty declared, when they were on the main highway. "Let's cut through those woods. It'll be a lot cooler, and it looks as if we'd come out again on the main road. See, it bends around, just the way the woods run."

Climbing over a rickety rail fence, they entered the woods and walked along in the shade. At first, they tried to keep the road in sight, but, finding this difficult, they decided on what was believed to be a parallel course, and held to that. Presently, the trees became more scattered, and the boys could see fields beyond. A barbed wire fence barred their progress now, but they scrambled through, each holding the wires apart for the other to crawl between. Once on the other side, however, no trace of the road was visible.

"Oh, it's just over here a little way," Tad

said, halting and pointing to the right. "I wonder what that funny-looking thing over yonder is."

Lefty looked at it a minute, then suggested, "Maybe it's a ruined castle, Tad, like those they build along the Rhine to make it romantic."

"Ruined mill, more likely! Or perhaps the ruins of a fort! You know this is Revolutionary country all through here, and that could easily be an old fort or some such thing. Let's take a look at it."

The building in question had been constructed of brick, and appeared to have been partially destroyed by fire. Its blackened and crumbling walls and gaping window-openings were almost completely covered with ivy, which shielded their bare ugliness and softened the appearance of extreme desolation.

The boys changed their course and approached the old building. Suddenly, a dog sprang out, barking and growling angrily. Close behind him, came a man almost as savage in appearance. He held a heavy stick in his hand, and as he approached the boys, he shouted excitedly:

"Get out of here! Get out of here!"
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CHAPTER XI

AROUND THE CAMP-FIRE AND IN THE ENEMY'S COUNTRY

THE boys were so startled by the sudden appearance of these savage guardians of the ruins that they neither moved nor spoke. The dog halted within a yard of their feet, growling in a manner most trying to the nerves, while the man flourished his club wildly, meanwhile shouting commands to leave the premises and threats of dire vengeance if they presumed to delay their going.

Presently, Tad found his voice.

"We are trying to reach North Rutland," he said in a pacific tone. "Will you be kind enough to tell us how to find the road? We seem to have lost our way."

"We didn't know that we were trespassing on your land," Lefty added. "We got off the road, and now we're trying to get back on again. We're not going to steal your—er—

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your dog. All we want is to get to North Rutland."

The man looked suspiciously at them for a moment, remaining silent the while. Then he spoke sharply to the dog, and abruptly turned back toward the ruins, his canine companion reluctantly following.

"Thank you!" Lefty called after him.

The man swung around and strode toward him, while Lefty defiantly held his ground. About four feet distant, he stopped and raised his club menacingly.

"What did you say?" he demanded angrily.

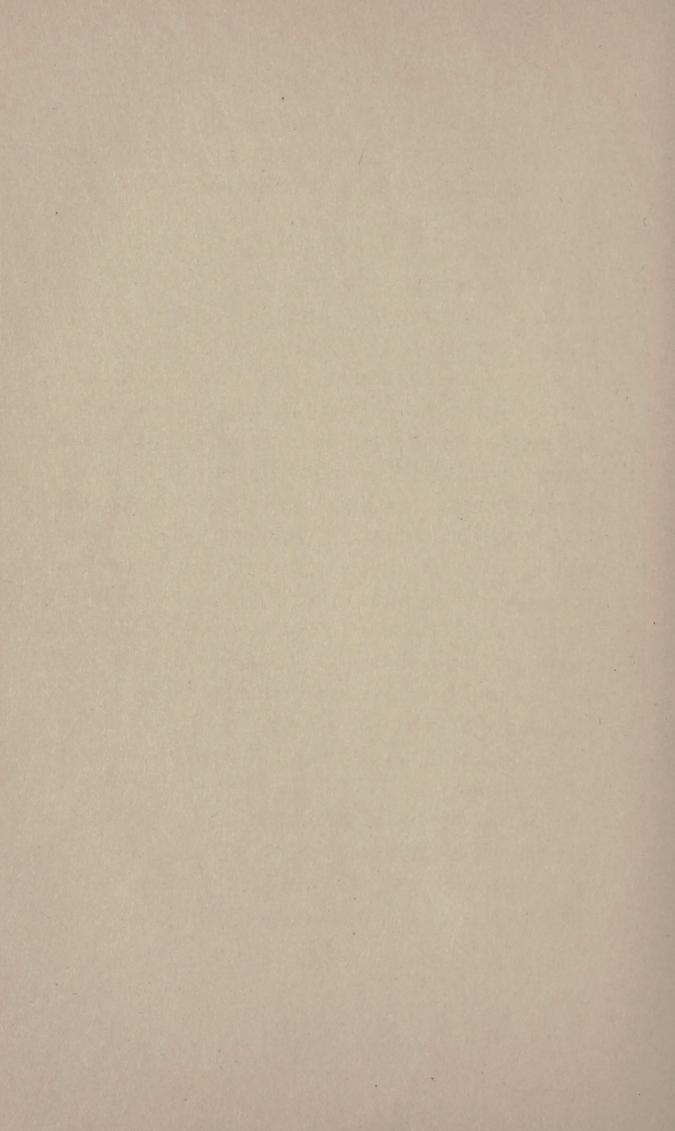
"I merely desired to assure you of our appreciation of your great kindness in directing us toward North Rutland," Lefty replied calmly. "Not many men, I fear, would have taken so much trouble for strangers."

The hermit glared at him uncertainly, as if he had failed to comprehend the boy's sarcasm. Then he pointed toward a fence in the distance and said roughly:

"See that fence? Just keep following that till you come to the road. Now clear out! If you come sneaking around here again, you'll wish that you'd stayed home."



He stopped and raised his club menacingly



"We do now," Lefty murmured.

"And if you tell anybody that you found me here—well, I 'll make you wish that you 'd kept still! Get along now!"

"Au revoir," Tad responded, bowing politely. "Very glad to have met you, sir."

They turned away then, keeping a sharp lookout for the dog, and tried to cross the field at a pace swift enough to be prudent, though not so rapid as to suggest undignified flight. If their steps were a bit hurried, no one was around who would be likely to ridicule their apparent haste. Several times they looked back, and each time found the monarch of the ruins watching them, the dog meanwhile crouched near him. The figures hardly moved as long as the boys remained in sight, and they could almost imagine that the savage growl of the four-footed sentinel still menaced their safety and peace of mind.

"Pleasant man to meet," Lefty ventured after a time.

"Extremely! So amiable and sweet-tempered! Why, I'm sure he'd go out of his way to help a stranger. I think he's crazy, Lefty. That's the reason I spoke gently to him. I've

heard that it 's better to humor an insane person."

"I don't believe he's been humored much. He didn't seem 'specially humorous. Do you think the dog was loony, too?"

"Sure! He had the same wild look in his eyes."

"And the same pleasant voice. I don't know what 's going to become of us, Tad. We lease a camp, pay our hard-earned ducats in advance for it, and expect to have a quiet, peaceful time. Then we arrive on the scene and find a sign stuck up warning us not to land. We arrange to have our stuff lugged over from the railroad station, and lo! it appeareth in the woods. We lay us down in peace to sleep, and behold! stealthy stealers steal stealthily upon us. We splash in the lake and find Cjax in our merry midst. We walk peacefully through the verdant meadows, and a crazy man with a loony dog sort of intimate that our presence is undesirable. The strain is awful! And just think -we 've been here only one full day and parts of two others. What will become of us before ten weeks roll around?"

"I can see where we'll all have to take the 210

rest cure at one of these health resorts," Tad gloomily predicted. "I think I 'll write ahead and reserve an easy chair in the sun-parlor. Is n't our life quiet and restful up here? No noise, no excitement, no thrills—just a sleepy, monotonous existence—not!"

After a little, they found that the hermit had correctly informed them, for, by following the fence which he had pointed out, they came presently upon the road to North Rutland. The afternoon sun blazed down upon the highway with almost no shade to relieve the torrid rays, and the light breeze felt like the hot blast of a furnace.

The boys did not feel inclined to hurry, so it was mid-afternoon when they reached the railway station. Wandering over to the freight house, they hailed with delight a dozen long, flat bundles tied with burlap wrappings, and consigned to "Thomas Townsend, Beaver Camp, North Rutland, Vermont." These were the much-desired cots.

Neighbor Pettingill announced his intention of bringing the cots and the two trunks not yet delivered over to Beaver Camp on the morning following, and they quite easily persuaded him

to add to his load such lumber as would be required for half-a-dozen benches.

Next they visited the sawmill.

"We want board, Tad," Lefty whispered, but not table-board. Don't let the man get mixed up and charge us for table-board when we want it for benches."

"When you 're buying lumber, you have to plank down your money in advance," Tad responded, and Lefty collapsed.

Having purchased their supplies, they prepared to return to Beaver Camp.

"Do you suppose they sell ice cream here or soda water?" Lefty asked, looking up and down the village street. "I think a banana split or a maple nut frappé would be tasty."

"Maybe they sell ice cream at the feed store," Tad responded doubtfully, "but don't go to calling for any of those fancy mixtures. If you do, the natives 'll think you 're trying to make fun of them. Where shall we go—to the tinsmith's or the shoemaker's?"

"There 's not much variety to confuse us, for which let us be truly thankful. Besides the railway station and the general store, there is only the sawmill and a feed store in addition to

the two industrious citizens you just mentioned. Suppose we tackle the general store."

This shop displayed ancient confectionery in a glass case, and sold root beer, ginger ale, sarsaparilla, and birch beer in bottles (eight cents each, and a rebate of two cents for the return of the bottle), but these beverages were not kept on ice, so Tad and Lefty decided to be content with a drink of well water along the homeward way.

Just as they turned away from the counter, two young men entered the store, and the boys had a good view of them. Their clothing and manner revealed the fact that they were not natives of any farming district. Indeed, they appeared like college students enjoying a summer holiday.

One of the young men, turning suddenly, discovered the scrutiny of the two boys. For a moment, he appeared startled, then, abruptly turning his back, he became much interested in the wares displayed for sale. Tad and Lefty walked slowly out of the door, but, once on the piazza, they looked back, and found both youths watching them with distinctly more than casual interest.

"Well, I hope they 'll know us when they see us again," was Tad's comment, and Lefty responded:

"I wonder how those fellows came into the family. They seemed surprised to see us, and very much interested in something about us—what it was is more than I can tell. Well, I 'm shock-proof now. Nothing that happens hereafter will upset me. Mysteries are getting to be every-day affairs."

"Maybe one of them is that crazy old hermit in disguise."

"Sure! Maybe the other fellow is the dog." Several other theories, some more sensible, some equally ridiculous were advanced during the homeward trip. They discussed the hermit, too, without reaching any agreement as to his sanity. Tad thought him crazy, while Lefty believed him to be merely surly and ugly. Neither could advance conclusive proof, so each held to his original idea.

They had agreed to say nothing about their adventure except to their fellow-campers, and, as it now was close to supper-time, they postponed the recital of their experiences until the big camp-fire was lighted, and all had gathered

around it. Then, with all the dramatic power of which they were capable, Lefty and Tad related their adventure, concluding by mentioning the peculiar interest which a certain pair of young men had taken in them at the general store in North Rutland.

To say that the boys were excited is stating the case very conservatively.

"What kind of dog was it, Lefty?" Charlie asked, after the first torrent of questions and exclamations had spent its force.

"The kind that such a man would be most likely to have," was the innocent response. "He was a little black-and-tan."

"But we were afraid of turning black and blue," Tad supplemented. "It looked very much as if we might when those two brutes got after us. It was a big dog, Charlie. Also it was a fierce dog, and I think it was a cross between a wolf and an elephant—very cross, in fact."

"What do you suppose the old fellow does out there in the wilderness?" Walter asked curiously.

"Maybe he 's one of the witches of Macbeth, and the dog 's another."

"But there were three. Where's the third witch?"

"Give it up! Attending a dress rehearsal, maybe."

"I wonder if he really is crazy."

"He certainly acted crazy," Tad affirmed. "He had a wild, vacant look in his eyes, and you ought to have seen how worked up he got when we didn't clear out just as soon as he told us to."

"He may be crazy," Lefty admitted, "but it seemed to me that he was more ugly than batty. Perhaps he acted sort of wild and loony just to make us believe he had wheels in his head. I believe the old fellow has something out there that he does n't want anybody to see. He keeps this dog, a great, big, savage brute, and it's not likely that any one'd go near the place while he was around. Perhaps he has a wonderful invention that he's half crazy about, and does n't want to run any risk of having somebody come snooping around to steal his ideas. That would n't be very unusual."

"Sure! He may be building a new kind of aeroplane," Eliot suggested.

"That's right! He seemed to go up in the air when he saw us coming."

"I'd like to find out what he 's up to," Jack ventured eagerly. "I wonder if we could coax the dog away and explore those ruins."

Lefty looked doubtful. "Perhaps we could, but I'm afraid that dog will be a hard animal to coax, Jack. He seems to have very positive ideas—dogged determination, I suppose. If you attempt to persuade him to leave the premises, I advise you to do it by telephone."

"Send him a wireless, Jack," Edgar suggested. "Fling a thought-wave at him."

"Do you suppose he sleeps nights?" Bert asked.

"Maybe he does," Tad replied doubtfully, "but I don't believe he 's a very sound sleeper, and it would n't surprise me a bit to hear that he walked in his sleep. I'd hate to fall over him in the dark. He has a peevish, fretful manner, and his society would be most unpleasant after such an accident."

"I'd like to have a look at that place," Jack declared. "I'm curious to know what the old fellow is doing 'way out there in the wilderness."

"It's our duty to call on him," Charlie added. "He's one of our neighbors, and we ought to get acquainted with him. I wonder if he has reception days."

"Considering the dog, had n't we better call at night?" Lefty inquired. "An evening call at nine or ten would be quite dressy. I think we shall find him in, and if he and the dog are asleep, of course we won't be rude enough to disturb them."

"We're all worked up to it now, and if we put it off, likely as not the doctor won't let us go, or somebody'll back out and break up the party. Let's start now—right away. It'll be dark when we get there."

"By the way, where is the doctor?" Eliot asked. "I have n't seen him since we finished supper."

"He's gone up to see Mrs. Spencer. She sent for him to come at some convenient time, so he lit out as soon as we finished eating. Didn't you notice how he was fixed up? Tell you what! purple and fine linen are n't in it with the doctor on dress parade."

"I wish I had a chance," Jack sighed mourn-

fully. "All you fellows have your fixings, but my trunk has been gathering dust over there in North Rutland, waiting for Neighbor Pettingill to get ready to bring it over here. It is a good thing I had some stuff in my suit-case, or I id look like a scarecrow."

"Far be it from me to suggest that you do, anyhow," Lefty retorted mischievously. "I have wondered why the pretty crows with their musical voices passed us by, but Jack has hinted at the reason."

"Crows steer for the corn, and we have n't any."

"Have n't we? You just look in the kitchen closet, Jacko! I saw a whole can of corn on the shelf this afternoon."

"What were you doing in the kitchen closet?"

"Oh—er—why, I just looked in to see if there was anything needed in North Rutland, but we've decided to do our shopping across the lake hereafter, have n't we, Tad?"

"That 's what we have!" was the goodnatured response. "They don't sell ice cream or banana splits or maple frappés in North Rutland."

"Of course not!" Tom exclaimed indignantly. "They sell wholesome food like beans and flour and peppermint sticks. You haven't any money to waste on those fizzy things, Tad. My word for it, you'll need it all before the summer is over."

"That 's the worst of having a little brother," Tad complained. "He lets out all the family secrets. Besides, proud critic, I have financial resources that you know not of. I have this day sold unto Cousin Willie a two-cent stamp and a postal card, receiving for the same three cents in cash," and Tad rattled the coins triumphantly in his pocket.

"If you're real good, we'll give you some ice cream to-morrow," Tom promised. "It'll be the Fourth of July, and we're going to celebrate."

"Well, I hope old 'Zekiel Pettingill will celebrate by bringing my trunk over," Jack sighed. "This suit is getting a trifle monotonous."

"Cheer up, Jacko!" Lefty remarked consolingly. "When you have only one suit, you don't have to worry about what you 'll put on. It might be lots worse. Just suppose you were sailing over the briny deep to visit the crowned

heads of Europe, with your baggage on a different steamer. I 've heard of such tragedies.''

Jack shook his head gloomily, and refused to be comforted. "I could be cheerful, too, Lefty, if your outfit was missing," he declared. "It's lots easier to bear trials philosophically when they strike some one else."

"Now, Jacko! You know that your tender heart would be wrung with pity if my things had turned up missing," Lefty remonstrated.

"Speaking of being without things reminds me of our furniture," Eliot remarked. "Did you get the boards for those benches while you were at the bustling metropolis?"

"Oh, yes," Tad assured him. "Can't we make them up in the mission style, Eliot? It would be real swell to have the bungalow furnished that way."

"I was just planning for some straight, plain benches," Eliot responded, shaking his head doubtfully. "Of course, we want them extra strong."

"And extra soft?" Edgar inquired.

"Why—er—no! Who ever heard of soft benches? Such luxury would n't be good for us, I'm afraid."

"We can talk furniture all day to-morrow," Jack reminded them, "but just now there are other things on the program. Are we going to call on our mysterious neighbor? It is a quarter past eight now. If we re going, we ought to get started."

"So say we all of us," Tad agreed. "Get the lanterns and any other trappings of war that the camp can furnish. Then let us sally forth to fling the gage of battle before yonder bold knight of the ivy-clad castle."

"It 'll be as dark as tar pretty soon," Bert announced. "Do you two fellows know the way?"

"Aye, follow the trusty guide!" Lefty announced with a dramatic flourish. "We will be in yonder moated grange (whatever that is) before another hour hath rolled over our heads."

They walked rapidly along the camp road, and followed the highway until they found the place where Tad and Lefty had come out, after their encounter with the hermit and his dog. This spot had been carefully noted by the two boys for possible future use.

Here they turned, climbed over a stone wall, and, with lanterns unlighted, crept along in the

shadows. No one ventured to speak, and if some hearts were beating faster than usual, perhaps it was only reasonable to expect such a coincidence with the exciting venture which claimed their attention.

Tad and Lefty were in the lead, the others following close behind them. All at once, the guides stopped and pointed across the fence. The others looked in the direction indicated, and could see a dark mass off in the middle of the field beyond. This was the ivy-clad ruin.

Silently and quietly, they climbed over the fence and cautiously approached the abode of the mysterious hermit. Not a sound betrayed the presence of either man or dog, and the boys grew bolder as they advanced. Step by step, they drew nearer. Now they were close to the walls.

Cousin Willie had an electric pocket-lamp that displayed a bright light when a button was pressed, so Lefty mounted the smaller boy on his shoulders, directing him to look inside the nearest window and see what was within.

Determined to appear brave, although he really was much frightened, the boy steadied himself against the wall, and took from his

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pocket the little flash-lamp. His hand trembled violently, but it was so dark that the boys could not see his agitation, for which Willie was thankful.

The wall was thicker than from the outside it appeared to be, so Willie stepped up on the broad bottom of the window opening, and edged forward, feeling his way carefully.

The bricks and mortar had been there for many years, and even his slight weight was more than could be sustained. While the boys waited eagerly for the flash of the lamp, and nerved themselves for any sensational result that might follow, they heard a sudden cracking, crumbling sound, a frightened cry, and a soft, dull thud.

At once, they realized what had happened. Cousin Willie had fallen inside the ruins.

CHAPTER XII

AN ADVENTURE AFTER DARK

"To the rescue!" cried Lefty, dashing around toward the doorway at the rear of the crumbling structure. "This way!"

Tad and Jack paused to light the lanterns which they carried. The others rushed forward immediately, and entered the ruined building. When the two lanterns arrived, their light illuminated the interior, revealing piles of brick, mortar, and rubbish of several sorts. Cousin Willie was lying upon a pile of hay in one corner, and his position scarcely had changed since his fall. He seemed too greatly terrified to move or speak. Except for himself and the rescuing party, the place was deserted.

Tad hurried over to the corner. "Hurt, Will?" he cried anxiously.

The boy sat up, pale and trembling, but silent.

"It's all right, Will," Tad went on consolingly. "Nobody's around, you see, except our crowd. The old hermit and Fido have skipped. I guess the fall knocked your breath out, did n't it?"

Willie nodded and drew a long, quivering breath. Lefty rushed forward and lifted him in his arms.

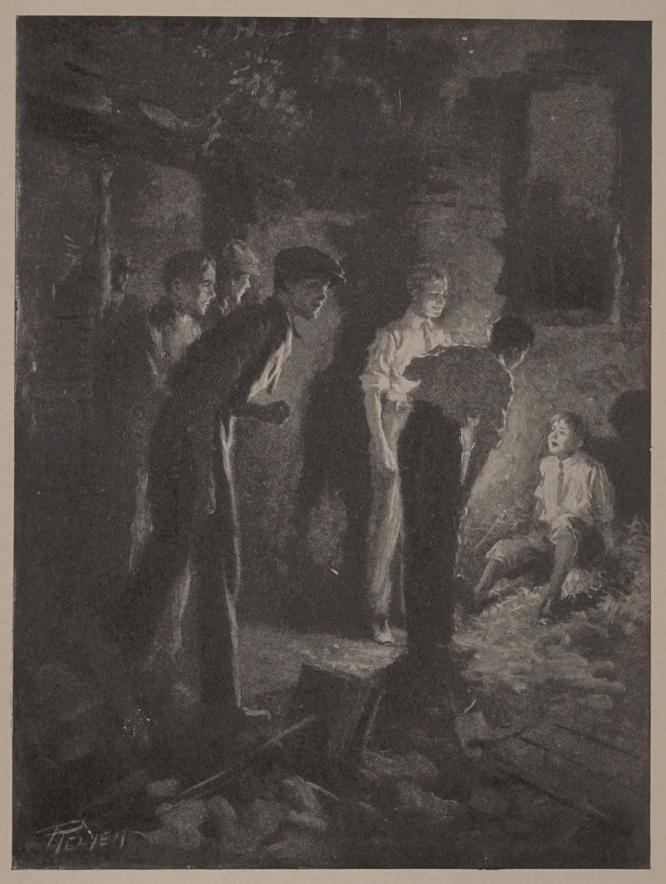
"The chi-i-i-i-ld is saved!" he announced in a dramatic tremolo.

"But where 's the dog?" Bert cried in surprise, picking up a stout club that lay near him.

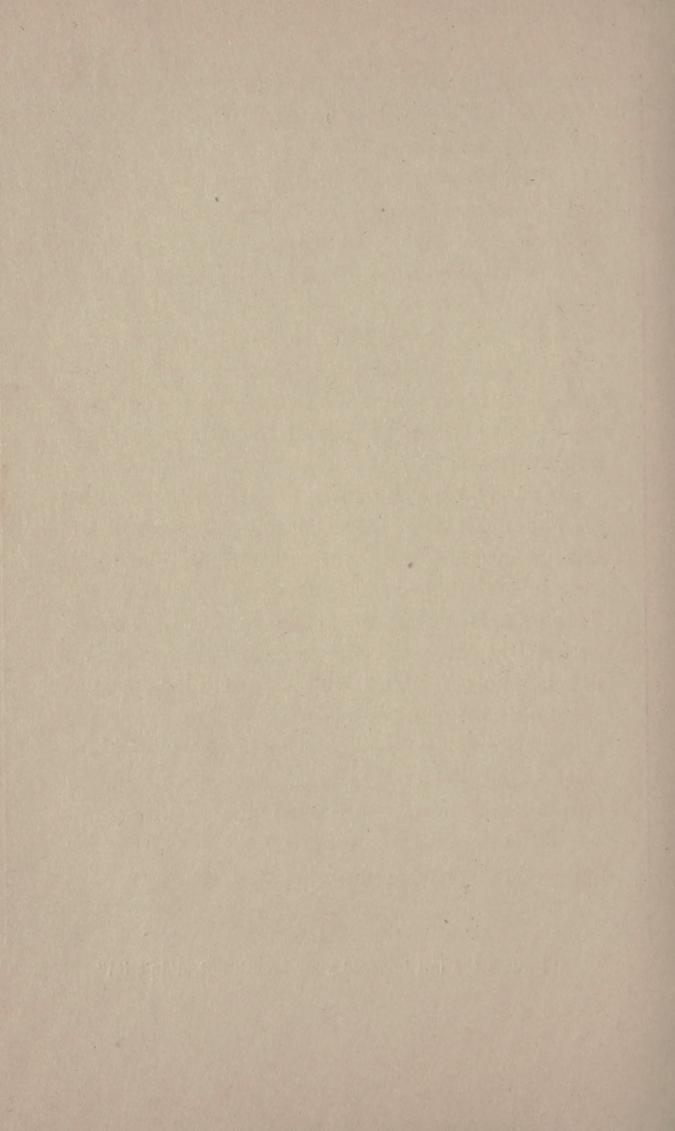
"Fido seems to have skipped to the happy hunting grounds," Tad announced. "May his bark find a quiet harbor."

"Ah! how poetic!" Bert murmured, poking around with his stick. "It is a mighty good thing for Willie that the old man and his dog are not around. I thought he was a goner when that wall gave way."

"That's right! I certainly thought it was all up with him," Eliot added. "He chose a good spot to fall, over there on the hay. It's a lot more comfortable to land on that than on a



"I guess the fall knocked your breath out, didn't it?"



AN ADVENTURE AFTER DARK

pile of bricks such as he would have found in the opposite corner."

"Bill showed artistic judgment in picking out a landing-place," Lefty agreed. "If only he'd gone to sleep, he might have been taken for 'Little Boy Blue'—'under the haystack fast asleep."

Lefty had been talking in a low tone to Cousin Willie, in an attempt to revive his courage, and the boy now had quite recovered from his fright. Soon he joined the others in their explorations.

Having found the ruins deserted, the Beaver Campers felt perfectly secure, and began a leisurely inspection of the dilapidated building. In the early days of its history, it might have been a fort, or perhaps an old mill, with a wheel turned by some stream that now flowed in another channel. The walls were smoked, and the tops had crumbled into a broken, irregular line. There was no roof, and the rear wall had in it a gaping opening large enough to admit a two-horse truck. Here and there, the vines which covered the outside had forced themselves in through the openings, and reached out

bravely in an effort to cover the bare ugliness of the interior.

It appeared probable that the owner of the premises had stored some farm produce in the building during the months past, for a pile of old hay lay in one corner (fortunately for Cousin Willie) and several barrels and baskets were lying on the ground.

A rude shelter, made of brush and boards, marked the lodgings of the hermit and his dog. A fire still smoldered before it, and empty cans were scattered about in disorderly confusion.

Bert poked around with his stick in an inquisitive fashion, but found nothing especially interesting, so he threw himself down upon the pile of hay to wait until the others had satisfied their curiosity.

As he touched the hay, he uttered a smothered exclamation of pain, and sprang to his feet, rubbing one shoulder caressingly.

"What 's the matter, Bert?" Edgar cried in surprise.

"Ow! There's something hard and sharp down there," Bert groaned, "and I landed right on it."

AN ADVENTURE AFTER DARK

"Maybe it 's Fido," Tad suggested. "He 's hard and sharp."

"Take a look, Bert," Charlie urged. "See what's hidden down there."

Cousin Willie had somewhat disarranged the pile of hay when he fell, and Bert's heavier weight had more noticeably crushed and flattened it. Still grunting and nursing his wounded shoulder, Bert grasped his stick and thrust it into the pile. It struck something hard and solid, and he stooped to investigate.

Just then, the stillness of the night was broken by a sound which struck terror into the hearts of the boys. It was the angry barking of a dog, softened somewhat by distance, but near enough to make cold chills run up and down the several spinal columns of the Beaver Campers.

"They 're coming back!" Tad cried in alarm. "Oh, joy! Put out the lights and run for all you're worth!" and he proceeded to set a glorious example.

In an instant, the lighted lanterns were extinguished, and the boys were scrambling through the opening in the rear wall. Onward they ran, stumbling over obstructions, breath-

less, frightened, yet spurred to their best pace by the deep, savage barking that seemed to be coming alarmingly near.

They reached the fence, after what seemed like a desperately long interval, and, somehow, they scrambled over it and reached the partial security of the farther side. Now they had only to follow this, and they would reach the road without much difficulty.

"I suppose there's no use trying to be quiet," Lefty gasped. "They can't hear us back there, and, anyhow, we made enough noise for a regiment, getting across that field."

"We 'll be all right if only that blood-thirsty brute does n't take a notion to follow us," was Tad's somewhat breathless reply. "I suppose he can pick up our trail all right if the old fellow lets him."

"Oh, yes! It would be right in his line. Where 's Bill?"

"I don't know. Is n't he in the crowd somewhere?"

"Can't see him! Hold up a minute, you fellows! Light one of the lanterns and we'll see if anybody's missing. Who's seen Bill?"

"He was with me when we climbed over the

AN ADVENTURE AFTER DARK

fence," Tom reported, "but I have n't seen him since."

Jack lighted his lantern, and the boys gathered around him. One-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight-nine—Cousin Willie was not with them!

"He's probably fallen down somewhere," Walter suggested. "Seems to me I heard some one fall near me, right after we hopped over the fence. I didn't pay much attention then, because I took it for granted that whoever it was would pick himself up and hustle along."

"Hark!" cried Eliot. "Listen to that dog. Is n't he coming nearer?"

"You fellows had better run along. Leave a lantern with me. I'll climb up in this tree, and, if the dog is following our trail, likely as not he'll run right by me. After he's gone on, I'll walk back and look for Bill."

There was no time for argument or delay, because the sound of excited barking was coming closer to them, and it seemed apparent that the dog was in eager pursuit of the fleeing boys.

Lefty fastened the lantern to his belt, and 233

climbed carefully into a tree not far from the fence, while the others hurried on toward the highway. He wondered vaguely what would happen if the dog should overtake the rapidly retreating campers, and ardently hoped that they might reach the shelter of the bungalow before their four-footed pursuer did.

For some minutes, Lefty sat in this arboreal shelter. The sound of rapid footsteps died away in the distance. Nearer and nearer came the dog. Now Lefty could hear him crashing through the bushes close at hand. At the foot of the tree, he stopped. Here it was that the boys had stood, and the dog, after a short pause, ran around uncertainly, trying to pick up the scent.

Lefty held his breath in suspense, thankful that, even should the dog discover him, he could not climb aloft in pursuit. Just then, Lefty heard a voice which he at once recognized as belonging to the hermit, and realized that the dog was being urged forward by his master, who showed a fierce eagerness to overtake and punish those who had so boldly invaded his domain.

In a minute or two, the dog found the scent 234

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and ran forward, the man hurrying in pursuit. Lefty felt relieved, however, for he judged that his fellow-campers must have reached the road by this time, and he believed that, once there, they would be able to return to Beaver Camp without mishap.

Lefty waited until the dog and his master had passed on. Then he scrambled to the ground and unfastened the lantern from his belt. He plunged a hand inside his pocket, then quickly withdrew it and searched eagerly through his other pockets. All at once, he remembered that he had given his matches to Jack, so that now he had no means of lighting the lantern which he had so carefully shielded in ascending and descending the tree.

"Thunder!" he muttered. "Also lightning, and a few hailstones for good measure!"

There was no way of overcoming the difficulty, however, so Lefty made the best of existing conditions, and picked his way carefully over the course which the boys had followed in coming from the fence to the point where the absence of Cousin Willie had been discovered. Every minute or two, he whistled cautiously, and soon heard a faint answering signal.

"Is that you, Bill?" he called, as loudly as he dared.

"Yes. All right, Lefty! Where are you?" and Lefty saw the bright light of Willie's pocket-lamp gleaming in the distance.

"Here! Straight ahead! More to the right now! Port your helm! Well, Bill, I'm glad to find you again. Where were you?"

"I caught my foot in getting over the fence," the junior partner explained, "and tumbled down in a lot of weeds and stuff. It didn't hurt me, but I got all mixed up and turned the wrong way-opposite to the other fellows. When I found out what I'd done, I heard the dog coming, so I was afraid to move until he got out of the way."

"It strikes me that you 're getting more than your fair share of excitement out of this thing, Bill," Lefty responded with a little chuckle. "I'm glad you have that electric lamp. I've got a lantern, but no matches, and, somehow, an unlighted lantern does n't give much illumination."

"I have a match-box," Will said, searching through his pockets. "Here, help yourself!" Lefty gratefully "borrowed" a match, and

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lighted the lantern. Then they set out together for the highway, and, as they went, Lefty related the experiences of the party from the time of Cousin Willie's accident until the discovery of his absence.

"Is n't it funny, Lefty, how you never know what 's going to happen to you?" Will remarked reflectively. "If anybody 'd told me six months ago that I 'd be going through these things, I would n't have believed it."

"No, I suppose not! Still, it will be a good thing for you, Bill, most likely. You 'll get accustomed to being mixed up in thrilling adventures by the time you've passed through a dozen more, which, at the present rate of progress, will be about this time to-morrow night. Just think, Bill, it was only this morning, early, that you and I were pattering around in the dark after that fellow who got away in the boat."

"That's so! It seems farther back than that, Lefty! It might have been a week ago, so much has happened since."

Thus talking together, they reached the highway in due season. Then they turned toward Beaver Camp. Occasionally, they heard the

vocal efforts of the hermit's dog, and now Lefty noted with alarm that the sound was coming nearer.

"The fellows must have reached camp all right, Bill," he announced, as calmly as possible, "because our kind-hearted neighbor seems to be returning from the chase, bringing his menagerie with him. If you care to see the procession go past, don't let me hinder you, but as for myself—well, there 's a brook just ahead, and I think I'll tarry under the bridge until the parade is out of sight."

"That ought to be a good place to hide, Lefty! The dog can't follow our trail in the water, so we 'll be safe."

They reached the brook in plenty of time, and walked up the nearer bank a hundred yards or more, in order to carry the dog out of the way in case he felt inclined to follow their trail. Then, removing their shoes and stockings, they waded back through the brook until they were concealed under the bridge that carried the highway across the little stream.

Here they waited until the dog passed their refuge, and the heavy footfalls of his master sounded upon the boards over their heads.

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Then they climbed out on the farther bank, and made their way back to camp, where a joyful welcome awaited them.

The other boys had reached Beaver Camp safely, although it had been necessary for them to run most of the way. The dog had followed them, even into the "clearing" around the bungalow, from which point he had been called off by his master.

Shortly after the arrival of Lefty and Cousin Willie, Doctor Halsey returned from his call at Mrs. Spencer's cottage, and a full history of the night's adventure was given him. He was enough of a boy to relish the excitement of this recital, and yet, being mindful of his duty as camp director, he spoke seriously to the boys of the folly and danger of plunging into reckless adventure, as well as the lack of proper regard for him which they had shown in leaving camp on such a mission without his knowledge and consent.

There was an interval of conscience-stricken silence when the doctor paused. Then Edgar remarked, "Well, anyhow, Bert has the box that he fell on, so there 's one souvenir of the night's work."

"That 's so!" cried Bert. "There 's been so much excitement since that I 'most forgot about it. I had just dragged this box out of the hay when the blooming dog began to yawp, and we all beat it. I had the thing under my arm all the time, and never realized it until we hopped over the fence. It was too late then to do anything about it, so I brought it back to camp with me, and here it is."

So saying, he produced a box of heavy tin, wrapped in several layers of newspaper. The tin was covered with black japan, ornamented with gilt stripes, and the box looked just like some that the boys had seen in the windows of stationery stores, designed to hold cash, jewelry, and valuable papers.

"No wonder the old fellow chased us!" Eliot exclaimed. "Most likely he 's a miser, and has a lot of money and all kinds of valuable things in that box. I'll bet he 's gone off to get the constable, or whoever it is up here that does such business, and means to have us all locked up."

"I should n't wonder," Jack agreed soberly.
"If we re found with that box in our hands,

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it won't do any good to claim that we did n't go over there on purpose to steal it."

The doctor had another theory, but he was quite willing that the boys should suffer the tortures of remorse for a time, in order that the folly of rushing heedlessly into danger might be impressed more forcibly upon their minds, and that they might learn a wholesome respect for the property rights of their neighbors.

"You see how seriously you are involved," he remarked quietly. "Not only did you leave camp on a dangerous and needless mission at a time when I was necessarily absent and was trusting to your honor and good sense to keep you out of mischief, but you have trespassed knowingly upon the property of a neighbor. You have actually stolen something that may be assumed to belong to him, and have placed yourselves in a position where you could be arrested and severely punished."

The boys looked frightened and ashamed. No one could frame an appropriate reply.

"What would your friends in the city think if the news should reach them that you had been arrested for stealing?" the doctor went on re-

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lentlessly. "You might convince them that it was merely a thoughtless prank, but I fancy that they would be distressed and displeased, nevertheless."

"We just went for the excitement of the thing," Bert urged, in a rather faltering defense. "We 'll put the box back, and the old hermit can see that we have n't taken anything. Anyhow, he did n't see any of us, so how can he prove that we were there? He can't prove that we took the box, either, so I don't see how he can make much trouble for us."

"He knows that some one was in the ruins to-night," the doctor replied. "He traced the trespassers with the aid of his dog, and found that they came from this camp. While he may not be able actually to prove anything more, you were very imprudent, and I hope you will never again do a thing which might bring disgrace upon Beaver Camp and spoil our vacation."

The boys were very penitent, and assured the doctor with much earnestness of their deep regret and contrition. He accepted their apologies, but gave them little comfort, and they wandered off by twos and threes to seek forgetfulness in slumber. By this time, they were

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thoroughly alarmed, and had visions of clanking chains, dreary dungeons, and all manner of unpleasant sequels to their nocturnal adventure.

"And just think! to-morrow will be the glorious Fourth," Lefty sighed unhappily. "We were going to have so much fun, but now—well, we can't tell what will become of us."

"We 're certainly in one horrible mess," Edgar replied hopelessly. "I feel awfully about it, but I 'm sorry for the doctor, most of all. We left him sitting there all alone by the fire and holding the box that 's been the means of getting us tangled up in this snarl. He looked as mournful as anything, and I 'll bet he feels worried."

At that moment, however, the doctor was smiling grimly at the glowing embers, as he recalled the alarm which the boys now felt. He reflected upon the probable value of this feeling as a moral tonic, and also he wondered how this box, so strangely committed to his keeping, might fit into a story which Mrs. Spencer had told him that evening.

CHAPTER XIII

"THE GLORIOUS FOURTH"

THE sleep of the Beaver Campers was restless and troubled that night, and they awoke on the morning of Independence Day feeling downcast and apprehensive. The box was not in sight, and the doctor did not refer to it, yet its influence was felt by all. The dawn was not saluted with the roar of exploding gunpowder. Somehow, none of the boys felt in the mood for festive joys.

When breakfast had been eaten, and the boys were busy in a half-hearted fashion about the camp, Doctor Halsey announced his intention of going up to Mrs. Spencer's cottage. The boys were surprised when he produced the box from a secure hiding-place and carefully deposited it in the boat, but they asked no questions.

Without dropping any hint of his purpose in taking on board so strange a cargo, the doctor

grasped the oars, and started up the lake, leaving the boys plunged in helpless, defenseless solitude.

"Well, what shall we do—stay here or quit the diggings?" Bert asked, as the boat disappeared.

"Stay, of course," Tom at once replied.
"No matter what happens, let's face the music."

"It won't be very merry music, I'm thinking," Lefty observed in a mournful tone. "Chopin's Funeral March would be quite appropriate, I should say."

"Oh, well! we may have been foolish, but we have n't done anything desperately wicked," Tad remarked, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "Let's brace up! If anybody should drop into our merry midst just now, he'd be apt to think that we'd been guilty of something dreadful."

"Some one's coming now!" Jack cried excitedly. "We're in for it! I can hear the sound of wheels on the camp road."

Tad made a comical gesture of resignation. "Tell them that I met my fate bravely," he muttered. "I yield, noble Roman—"

"Oh! Why, it is only Neighbor Pettingill with the cots and stuff," Jack announced with very evident relief.

"Humph! I had all my yielding for nothing," Tad complained. "Next time, gentlemen, I positively will not surrender without a struggle. I shan't go through that performance again."

Mr. Pettingill, with the help of the boys, unloaded the cots, the lumber, and the two trunks which had not previously been delivered to the Beaver Campers. Then he drove off to join in the extremely mild hilarity of the North Rutland celebration.

"We may as well get busy on the benches," Tad remarked. "It 'll occupy our minds and keep us from moping around. Besides, it 'll look better if the police force pounces on us to demand the box. They 'll see that we 're industrious fellows, anyhow, even if we do put in a little night work now and then, by way of variety."

Some of the boys attacked the burlap wrappings which protected the cots; while others sawed, and measured, and hammered as Eliot directed, in an effort to construct a few benches

that would stand the wear and tear of camp life.

While they were thus busily employed, Doctor Halsey, minus the box, returned to camp.

"The box has been restored to its owner," he quietly announced.

"What did the old fellow say?" Bert asked with eager interest.

"What old fellow?"

"Why, the old hermit out there in the ruins! Does n't the box belong to him?"

"Oh, no! It belongs to our neighbor, Mrs. Spencer."

"Mrs. Spencer!" the boys echoed in bewildered surprise.

The doctor laughed at their very apparent astonishment. "It's a rather odd story," he said, "but I'll tell it as simply as I can.

"Mrs. Spencer has occupied the cottage above us for a number of summers. Mr. Raymond has lived here, and Mr. Samuelson (who, by the way, may be discussed freely now) is an all-the-year-'round resident of a comfortable farm below us.

"A year or two ago, Mr. Samuelson induced Mrs. Spencer to invest some money in a tract

of land a few miles east of us. It includes a quarry and several acres of timber. He also had a share in the venture, which has resulted quite favorably. About a month ago, a company was formed to purchase this land and operate the quarry. Both Mr. Samuelson and Mrs. Spencer received an offer from this company to purchase their interests at fair prices. They decided to accept the terms, and Mrs. Spencer brought up with her from the city all the deeds and other papers relating to the case. These were packed in the tin box which you discovered, and she gave it to Mr. Samuelson, who acted as her agent in the matter.

"About a week ago, this box disappeared from his house, and all efforts to locate it have been unsuccessful. The man whom you discovered out there in the wilderness has been employed as a farm hand by Mr. Samuelson, and it appears now that he must have stolen the box and was guarding it. He is a wild, ugly, surly fellow of whom little is known, but he worked well about the farm, and help is so hard to get that he was kept, in spite of his social shortcomings.

"Why did he take the box? Well, it seems 248

that some man across the lake is very anxious to prevent the formation of the proposed development company. He wants to buy the land for his own use, believing that it will be very profitable for him to do so. He must have suspected that the company depended for its success upon its ability to arrange favorable terms with Mrs. Spencer and Mr. Samuelson, because -too late-he called upon them and tried to induce them to decline the offer made by the company. This they could not do, having already signed certain agreements binding themselves to deed the property to the new owners as soon as the conditions of sale were fulfilled. The man was greatly disappointed, and it seems probable that he has tried to prevent the sale from being effected by getting possession of the papers. He did not destroy them, or alter them in any way. Mrs. Spencer examined the contents of the box this morning and nothing has been disturbed. She supposes that he had some hope that the company would give up the idea of working the quarry when the men in it learned that the present owners of the property could not convey it to them. To be sure, the legal papers in the case could be duplicated,

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but this process would take some time, and the company was anxious to start immediately.

"Of course, it was a mean bit of work, and the chances of success were very slight, because, even with the papers missing, it is likely that some way would have been found to arrange matters to the mutual satisfaction of the purchasers and sellers. There was just a chance, however, that negotiations would be broken off, and then this schemer counted on getting the property himself at a reduced price. Of course, we don't know that this theory is correct. There are some points that seem a little unreasonable, and we have not the faintest shadow of actual proof to implicate this man in the disappearance of the papers.

"It may have been, you know, that your fancied hermit took the box, believing that it contained articles of value, and kept it in the hope that a reward would be offered for its return. At any rate, I 'm inclined to think that the man across the lake knew something about it, because that explains the presence of the two prowlers who disturbed our sleep night before last. One came from across the lake, you remember, and the other from the country back

The Beaver Campers celebrate the Glorious Fourth



of us. Perhaps they were meeting here to plan what should be done next.

"Now you know as much about the matter as I do. The box has been returned to its owner with contents unharmed, and she is greatly relieved, so we have good cause for celebrating the glorious Fourth."

"Well, how about our stuff being dragged out into the woods, and the signs, and the cat that was left here in the crate, and the other tricks?" Tom asked. "The villain and the assistant villain were n't responsible for those things."

The doctor shook his head. "No. Mr. Raymond always left a set of keys to his buildings here with Mr. Samuelson, and I think Mrs. Spencer did, too. In their absence, he looked after the property, and had repairs made whenever necessary. Mr. Samuelson arranged with Neighbor Pettingill to bring our baggage and freight over from the North Rutland station, and evidently he did so. I suppose some of our neighbors are trying to play a few tricks on us. The fact that those village boys assured us that we were living in a haunted camp would seem to suggest that explanation."

"Why did n't Mrs. Spencer want us to talk about Mr. Samuelson?" Tom wanted to know.

"As soon as the box disappeared, he left home to trace it. Nothing was said about the matter, except to the parties most directly interested, and he did not want to have his absence talked about in the neighborhood. That was the reason Mrs. Spencer spoke as she did. Her references to some hidden mystery concerned the box that had so strangely vanished, and had no personal connection with Mr. Samuelson, as we supposed."

"Has he come back from his scouting expedition?" Eliot asked.

"Yes. He was at Mrs. Spencer's cottage when I called, and is greatly relieved to know that the box has been discovered."

"But what has become of Fido and his—er—tutor?" Lefty inquired.

"I don't know. I rather think that Fido and his master will disappear from the neighborhood. You are not likely to be troubled again by either of them."

"Farewell, Fido!" Tad murmured. "Joy be your portion evermore."

"Another thing!" the doctor went on.
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"There will be a little celebration this evening at Mrs. Spencer's cottage, and we are invited. On your behalf, I accepted with much pleasure. Is that all right?"

"Sure thing!" cried Lefty with much enthusiasm. "I am very anxious to see—er—Cjax again," and the others voiced similar sentiments.

They discussed the mystery of the tin box with considerable animation, and the spirits of the boys rose rapidly. The reaction from intense gloom and nervous apprehension carried them into a condition of exhilaration and noisy enthusiasm.

Tad lifted his cap from his curly locks. "A great weight has been taken off my mind," he announced. "No more do my eyes see dismal visions of prison bars. No more do my ears hear the dull clanking of heavy chains. No more do—does my nose—er—what does my nose do?"

"It reflects the beauteous sunset," Tom told him. "If I were as green as you are, and had such a red nose, I'd be afraid that people would mistake me for a poppy plant."

"Why, the very idea!" gasped Tad. "Hear 255

the child talk! Never mind! It's only jealousy that makes him hand out such uncomplimentary remarks. If he had a pretty red nose like mine, it would give him something to sing through."

"He might sing through a megaphone," Jack

suggested playfully.

"Or through an attack of measles," Lefty added.

"Don't talk about such things," Edgar cautioned them, "because you'll get the doctor excited, and he'll be dropping pills on the griddle."

Then the cooks impressed them into service, and further remarks were confined to more practical topics.

In the afternoon, they had a jolly frolic in the lake, and used every noise-making article that the camp could furnish in an effort properly to celebrate the day. When all the gunpowder available had been sacrificed to salute the birthday of national independence, and the ardor of the boys had somewhat cooled, the Beaver Campers carefully inspected their several wardrobes in an effort to select their choicest garments so that they might appear

at their best when they visited Mrs. Spencer during the evening.

"A collar feels extremely dressy after you've been wearing a flannel shirt," Lefty groaned. "Ah! Behold Bill in his lovely white ducks. I can see where he makes a hit, all right."

Cousin Willie laughed good-naturedly. Already, he had caught the camp spirit, so contagious in this merry company, and it is doubtful if those who had known him in the city would have at once realized that this was indeed the same William Langley Ainsworth, Junior.

"I'd lend you a pair, Lefty, only they 'd be a little short for you," he replied.

"Can you sit down when you wear those things, Bill?" Charlie asked.

It was the first time that any one but Lefty had addressed him by this familiar name, and his satisfaction increased tremendously as he realized that he was "making good."

"Sure! Why not?" he responded.

"I should think you 'd be afraid of getting them dirty."

"Oh, they can be washed, you know."

"Why, yes! That's the reason they call 'em ducks," Tad explained. "It's because they take to water so easily. Who's got a button-hook?"

"Going to take your mandolin along, Tad?"
Cousin Willie asked.

"I don't know. I'm so shy that it might make me nervous to play before so many people."

The others hooted derisively. Evidently they did not share Tad's modest fears.

"Oh, yes! Take it along, Tad!" Bert urged, and he good-naturedly agreed.

The Beaver Campers found Mrs. Spencer waiting to receive them, and very soon they felt real well acquainted not only with their hostess but also with her two daughters and two nieces who were spending their summer holidays at the Spencer cottage.

Of course, the boys had to begin at the beginning, and relate the full history of the adventure which had resulted so happily, and they had an audience that gave flattering attention to the recital.

After this, there were some fireworks to be displayed, and the campers gallantly bore the

responsibility of "punk and powder and perilous possibilities," as Tad expressed it.

Tad and his mandolin helped to pass a very delightful hour when the last rocket had fallen into the lake, and the glow of the brilliant lights had faded. He played a few instrumental pieces, then changed to songs which the others knew, and soon the clear, young voices were raised in song, much to the delight of Mrs. Spencer.

No celebration that numbers boys among the guests is quite complete without refreshments. Mrs. Spencer knew enough of boy life to be well aware of this fact, so, shortly before ten, they were invited into the dining-room. This spot now possessed a sort of historic interest for the Beaver Campers, for here it was that their first meal in northern latitudes had been eaten. This time, it was not soup and other "emergency rations" which the boys found awaiting them, but plenty of ice cream and home-made chocolate cake cut into generous slices. To this festal fare, the guests gave prompt and pleasurable attention.

A little more music followed, then the Beaver Campers rather reluctantly spoke their words

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of parting, and started back toward camp. "Well, it's been really a glorious Fourth!" Tom exclaimed. "Things this morning were so blue that it didn't seem as if they ever would be different, but all at once the clouds rolled away, and we've had a fine time ever since."

"Yes," Walter agreed. "That just shows that you never can tell how a day is going to turn out by the way it starts."

With which philosophical remark many will agree.

CHAPTER XIV

COUSIN WILLIE SEES A GHOST

A FTER the excitement which had attended the first few days at Beaver Camp, the boys were not sorry to have a period of calm, with no sensational developments to interfere with the quiet enjoyment of camp life.

On Sunday evening, they went up to Mrs. Spencer's and had an informal praise service about the piano, Tad and his mandolin furnishing valuable aid.

Monday found them at work on the athletic field. This plot never would be ideal, but each day's efforts made conditions a little more favorable, and Lefty hoped to commence serious baseball practice by the end of the week.

Tuesday brought rain—a soaking north-east downpour—and the boys busied themselves about the camp buildings, wrote letters, and otherwise occupied the hours that seemed so

much longer than those that marked the passing of clear days.

Wednesday was clear and cool, so the boys attacked the athletic field again, and talked hopefully of arranging a series of games with the village boys before many more days had passed.

Wednesday evening brought the first really startling experience of the week. It was Cousin Willie's turn to keep the camp supplied with water. When the others had gathered about the camp-fire, he set off along the familiar path to the spring to get a pailful of drinking water for their refreshment.

His courage was stronger than it had been in days past, and he had grown somewhat accustomed to prowling around in the dark, so he took the lantern and pail and started on his mission without any conscious shrinking from the unknown perils of the night.

Once within the shadow of the woods, however, he had to acknowledge a feeling of sudden fright. Something in front of him and a little to the right claimed his fascinated attention. It was tall—at least two feet taller than a man—and white. The formless whiteness seemed to slip in and out among the trees in a

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manner truly spectral, and the boy was sure that the figure drew nearer to him.

He rallied his rapidly waning courage, and tried to persuade himself that it was foolish to believe in the existence of ghosts. He even attempted to convince himself that the vision was just a blanket which one of the campers had hung up in a tree and forgotten to remove. Still his knees trembled, and his teeth chattered uncomfortably. The report that the camp was haunted came freshly to his mind, and this increased his distress. Had the ghost of Beaver Camp arrived for one of its reported visits?

He turned to retrace his steps, but just then a new and very reasonable suggestion occurred to him. Perhaps one of the campers, knowing that he must pass along that path after dark, had draped a ghostlike figure and placed it there to test his courage.

Well, he would just convince his companions that he had as much grit as any of them. The idea of trying to frighten him with such a trick! Why, he was n't a baby any more, to be terrified by specters of the night! He'd show them! Oh, yes—

But still it required heroic effort to make him turn again toward the spring, pick up his pail, and walk resolutely forward. His will power had been galvanized into action, however, during the recent past, and he forced himself to continue onward until he had reached the goal.

He filled the pail with the cool, sparkling water, and started back toward the camp-fire, a little surprised at his "nerve" but thankful, nevertheless, that every step was carrying him nearer the other campers. Hurrying as fast as he could with his burden, he reached the clearing beyond the woods, and approached the boys grouped about the big fire.

"There's a ghost back in the woods," he remarked casually, as if such visitors were quite usual.

"A what?"

"A ghost. We heard that the camp was haunted, you know. One of the ghosts has come back to see who 's here."

"It's probably a stray cow," Eliot suggested.

"No, it is n't, Eliot. Really! It was about 264

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eight feel tall, and white, and it had long arms, sort of stretched out."

"Wow! I'm glad I didn't meet it, kid! Where was it?"

"Not far from the spring—off in the woods." In spite of his effort to appear unconcerned, the boys could not help observing that Cousin Willie had been frightened. They wondered what apparition had confronted him in the dark, silent woods.

"Shall we go forth and dare him to mortal combat?" Tad asked eagerly.

"Maybe it is n't a 'him,' Tad," his brother suggested, "and ghosts are n't supposed to be mortal, you know. That makes it extremely hard to carry on any kind of combat with one of them."

"Of course, I'm eager to draw my sword in defense of Beaver Camp," Lefty assured them, "but—er—had n't we better wait until the ghost comes out on the beach? There's so much more space here, and the light is better, not to speak of—"

"Oh, look!" gasped Charlie. "There comes the ghost!"

"Two of them!" Jack added excitedly. "What spooky things! They must be fully eight feet tall, just as Bill said."

There could be no doubt about it! The ghosts of Beaver Camp really had arrived. Of course, science and sense asserted that such things did not and could not exist. Yet, one could not doubt what his eyes actually beheld, philosophical statements to the contrary not-withstanding.

Nor were the boys asleep, and merely imagining the presence of the specters as part of an unpleasant dream. On the contrary, they were unusually wide-awake just now. Too greatly bewildered and startled to say much, all had risen; and now they stood watching with a sort of hypnotic fascination the slow, impressive progress of the specters as they moved along the beach toward the fire.

Each was fully eight feet tall. The heads were invisible, except for the eyes which glowed with a kind of phosphorescent brilliance. The long arms of the ghosts were extended, and occasionally these moved, as if beckoning to the boys. Loose white draperies fluttered about the figures, and, taking them altogether,

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they were not reassuring objects to discover in a dark spot.

"There are only two of 'em!" Lefty muttered after a minute or two. "Let 's rush 'em! Come on! When I count three, all yell like pirates, and run right at 'em. One—two—three!"

A series of war-whoops which would have done credit to a tribe of Comanche Indians smote the stillness of the night. Then the boys rushed forward, Doctor Halsey with them.

The ghosts must have felt alarmed for they halted, swayed unsteadily for a few seconds, then pitched forward, falling flat upon the ground. Behind each ghost stood a mortal—perhaps a guide and personal conductor whenever the specter desired to visit the terrestrial regions.

This was a surprise to the boys, and their wild rush came to an abrupt stop. Then one of the mortals addressed the doctor.

"Good evening, Doctor. Pleasant evening after the storm, is n't it?"

"We thought it would be neighborly to call," the other added, "and we brought the family with us."

"Well, of all things!" gasped the astonished camp director. "Where did you two fellows drop from?"

"Why, we are boarding with one of your neighbors, Samuelson by name, and we thought our call might be more impressive if we brought our friends along."

"It surely was impressive, not to say spectacular," laughed the doctor.

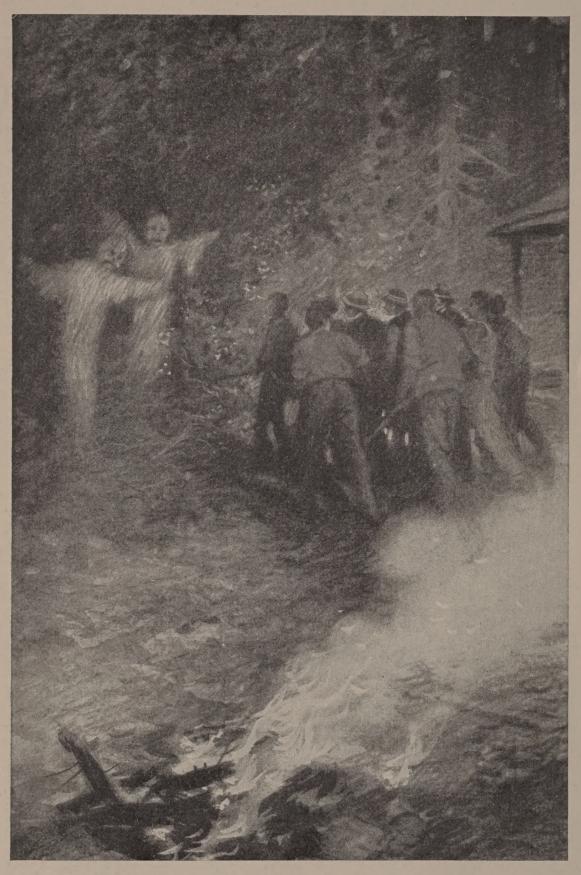
Then he explained to the boys that the two young men were classmates of his in the medical school. He had known of their intention to spend the vacation somewhere along the shores of Lake Champlain, but had not realized how near to Beaver Camp they would be.

Tad walked over to Lefty, and said in a low tone, "These are the fellows who eyed us so sharply when we were on our shopping trip in North Rutland. Remember?"

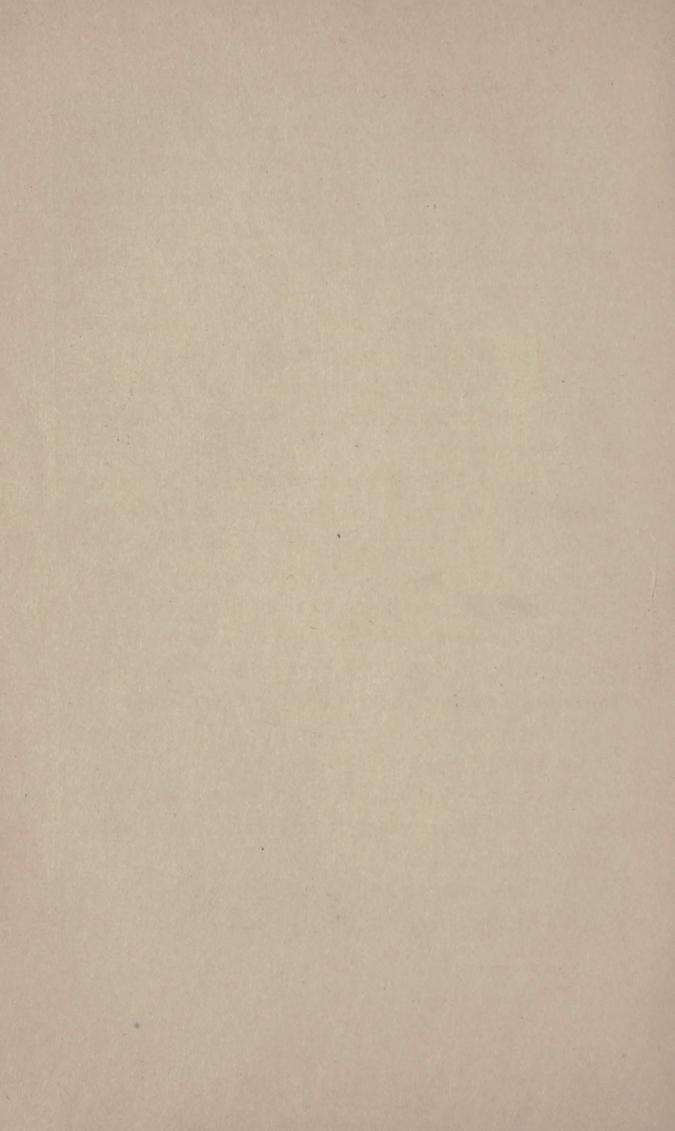
And Lefty nodded a vigorous assent.

The Beaver Campers were duly introduced to the two young men, Franklin Stover and Paul Rutledge by name, and the whole party went back to the camp-fire to improve their acquaintance.

The "ghosts" proved to be nothing more 268



They were not reassuring objects to discover in a dark spot



COUSIN WILLIE SEES A GHOST

than several yards of sheeting draped on poles, with heads rudely formed and features marked on the cloth. The poles were so arranged that the "arms" could be moved by one who stood behind, thus imparting the appearance of life to the figures.

"We called here more than a week ago," Stover announced, "but you had n't arrived—"

"And so you made yourselves at home and carried our things out into the woods," the doctor interrupted.

"Well, we thought it would be so much healthier and more comfortable for them out-of-doors," Stover explained with an air of guileless innocence. "It seemed very warm and stuffy in your bungalow, and you have not studied medicine all these years without learning the importance of fresh air. We really took a great deal of trouble for your sakes. It may not seem polite to complain, but some of those things were a trifle weighty."

"We noticed it when we put them back," the doctor observed grimly. "How did you enter our sylvan bower?"

"Oh, your kind and obliging neighbor, with refreshingly rural simplicity, had left the keys

under a piece of carpet laid before your hospitable entrance! Also he had published his action in such manner that all visitors might behold and sing his praises."

"I suppose you put up the sign of welcome down by the landing."

"Yes. Rather an artistic effort, we thought. It harmonized well with the scenery. Didn't you think so?"

"Oh, certainly! Anything artistic appeals strongly to us. I suppose we must thank you for our feline visitor, too."

"Oh, do not thank us," Stover begged modestly. "We did not do it for the sake of being praised. The wandering minstrel appeared without explanation or excuse upon the porch of our humble manse, and we shared our blessings with you."

"For which we thank you!" Doctor Halsey responded with a laugh.

Then he, with the assistance of the boys, told the two visitors of the numerous and varied experiences which had kept their camp life from becoming dull and monotonous.

"Well, I should say that your first week had been a trifle strenuous," Rutledge observed.

COUSIN WILLIE SEES A GHOST

"Don't you feel like taking the rest cure by this time?"

"It's so restful to get out into the country," Stover commented. "The little birds sing blithely in the trees, the cows placidly Fletcherize underneath; the bees go humming and buzzing around, the fleecy clouds drift slowly across the sky, hens cackle, roosters crow, and the soft summer zephyrs gently rustle the leaves."

"You sound like Wordsworth," Rutledge remarked. "You can imagine how I suffer when Stover gets one of his poetical fits on. He can babble like that all night."

"You remind me that I left the babbling brooks out of my description of rural life," Stover replied quickly. "The babbling brooks flow musically over the stones, the wild flowers spring up along the highways, oh, there's nothing like life in the country!"

"That's right!" Doctor Halsey agreed cheerfully. "The little birds sing so blithely in the trees that they wake you up at four o'clock, and you can't get another wink of sleep. The bees go humming and buzzing around your head until you are driven into frenzy. Hens

cackle and roosters crow whenever you want to take a nap. The fleecy clouds, drifting across the sky, suddenly roll around and work up into a thunder-shower when you are five miles from shelter. The soft summer zephyrs hit you in the back of the neck and give you a cold that hangs on all winter. The highways are so dusty that you could n't see a wild flower if it did grow. Generally there 's nothing to be seen but burdocks and ragweed. All kinds of creeping, crawling, flying things assault you, waking or sleeping. Oh, yes! There 's nothing like life in the country, providing a person is strong enough to stand it."

"Pessimist!" Stover howled. "Barbarian! You have n't an ounce of poetic imagination. Alas, that you should have fallen with such an awful thud."

The boys were vastly amused at the contrast thus presented, and a hilarious discussion followed.

After a time, the two visitors declared that they must leave, because late hours were not considered fashionable at their summer resort. The Beaver Campers walked with them for a part of the homeward way, then returned to

COUSIN WILLIE SEES A GHOST

seek the comfort of Tom's cots, which so far had justified his faith in them.

They decided that these two young men would prove lively and most agreeable neighbors, whose presence and participation would add much to certain plans for the future which already were being discussed.

CHAPTER XV

BEAVER CAMP VS. NORTH RUTLAND

BY the end of the week, Beaver Camp had an athletic field. True, it left much to be desired, but it provided a baseball diamond, marked out with infinite pains according to official measurements, so the boys felt satisfied with their efforts.

Lefty, being a veteran player, was by general consent invited to act as captain of the camp team, and he undertook the difficult and delicate work of getting out of each player the best work of which he was capable.

Some of the boys had played on teams at home, others had but little experience and less skill. (Cousin Willie was in the latter class.) All were willing to work hard, however, and this was the most encouraging development of the first day's practice.

Franklin Stover and his friend Rutledge 276

walked over to the field, and helped Captain Lefty with many suggestions and friendly criticisms. Doctor Halsey, too, dropped a valuable hint now and then, although he declared that baseball was not his specialty, but if only they would change their minds and decide to play football, he might help them in a way worth talking about.

Whenever any of the campers visited North Rutland, he found the natives eager to cross bats with them, so it was finally arranged that a series of three games should be played; one at North Rutland, one at Beaver Camp, and the deciding game, if one was necessary, at North Rutland.

Stover consented to umpire the contests, and Rutledge agreed to act as official scorekeeper. The preliminaries being settled, practice took on an added degree of earnestness, and Captain Lefty's hopes grew stronger with each passing day.

One bright, warm Monday afternoon, the Beaver Campers, equipped with all the baseball supplies that their combined resources could furnish, journeyed over to the village to meet their opponents in the first game of the series.

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Before play commenced, Umpire Stover made a speech to the members of the competing teams and the small group of spectators, promising to award a stick of peppermint candy to each member of the team that should win the series. This excited the merriment of the boys, and seemed to inspire each player with an ardent desire to win the delectable prize.

Beaver Camp went to bat, and the North Rutland players took their places. The natives were strong, sunbronzed fellows, who appeared to be abundantly able to give a good account of themselves in any sort of athletic contest.

"Play ball!" cried the umpire.

The North Rutland pitcher wound himself up like an alarm-clock, and sent over a ball that cut the plate squarely in two. Strike one.

"Some speed!" Tad muttered from the bench. "I wonder if he can last."

"Sure thing!" Edgar replied. "He looks stronger than an elephant."

In the meantime, Charlie had struck out, and Lefty faced the rival pitcher. Though he smiled confidently, he was feeling decidedly uncertain as to results. After two strikes had been called, Lefty found the ball for a high in-

field fly that was caught easily, and he joined his companions on the bench.

"Good start!" he observed with a cheerful grin. "I can see just about six runs coming to us this inning."

"That 's more than any one else sees," Jack responded, as he picked up his glove. Eliot had been retired at first on a grounder to short.

Lefty walked over to the pitcher's box, and the first batter for North Rutland selected his favorite bat and faced him with an air of jaunty confidence.

Lefty twisted himself into kinks, then suddenly straightened out and shot the ball over. Almost immediately, there sounded a sharp crack, and the ball sailed out, out, out—some distance beyond the most remote outfielder. Edgar reached it just after it fell, and relayed it back, holding the runner at third. Here he took a cautious lead, while Lefty watched him closely, trying meanwhile to recover from the shock of the opening number on the program.

The second man fouled twice in his anxiety to bring in a run, ending his performance by striking out. Lefty felt better.

The North Rutland captain had been talking in a low tone to the next batter, and Lefty felt that he would give much to know just what deep plot they had arranged. He tried a wide ball, but the man was not tempted. A strike was called next. Then the batter met the ball fairly, and it went speeding into deep right field.

Jack got under it, catching it as it fell, but threw wide to Tad who had run out to relay it home, and the man on third scored.

The next man hit a clean single, but was put out trying to steal second, and the inning ended with the score one to nothing, in favor of North Rutland.

The second inning added another run to their score, while Beaver Camp was awarded a second goose egg.

Lefty improved in the third, and the North Rutland men were unable to hit him safely. Their pitcher still puzzled the campers, however, and none of them had much exercise in base-running.

In the fourth, fifth, and sixth, the struggle was very close, with few errors, excellent pitching, and no runs for either team.

In their half of the seventh, it looked as if Beaver Camp would tie the score. Walter reached first on a well-placed drive, and stole second. Jack knocked out a long grounder, just between third and short, but it was fielded neatly, and Tom, on the coaching lines, held Walter at third. Then a wide ball passed the catcher, and Walter came home.

This ended the scoring, unfortunately, for Charlie's bunt put him out at first, Lefty knocked a high foul that was caught, and Eliot struck out.

North Rutland scored again in its half of the seventh, but in the last two innings, the ball did not get outside the diamond, nor a runner beyond second.

The North Rutland boys cheered their opponents with hearty good-will, and the campers responded with perhaps a little less noise, as befitted a cheer that marked no victory, but merely a complimentary expression of true sportsmanlike spirit.

"We had to let them take the first game, just to encourage 'em," Lefty observed, as they walked back toward camp. "It would n't have been polite to wallop 'em the first time. Wait

until they strike our polished diamond. Then you 'll see the sparks fly."

"The two teams are rather evenly matched, I should say," Stover remarked. "Those fellows have played together longer than you have, and they hit harder. You'd better have a lot of batting practice before the second game."

"Yes, I don't know when we 'll have another chance to win a peppermint stick apiece," Tad responded. "I'd like to get one of those miniature barber's poles between my teeth."

"Bad for your teeth," Stover warned him. "Better let me eat it for you."

"I 'll share with you if we win," Tad promised eagerly.

"Here, quit bribing the umpire!" Rutledge remonstrated, and then there was a general laugh and a chorus of merry comments.

The next few days were improved by the campers in developing the batting and fielding skill of the team, while Lefty practised pitching at every favorable opportunity, Bert acting as catcher.

When the North Rutland boys reached the camp diamond, Lefty's team felt able to handle

them, though fully conscious of the strength and skill of their opponents and having sufficient respect for these qualities to prevent overconfidence.

The Beaver Campers found it easier to hit the North Rutland pitcher during the second game. Somehow, his delivery was not so very puzzling, after one became familiar with it, and by the end of the sixth inning, the campers had three runs to their credit.

Lefty was steadier than he had been in the first game. During the first six innings, he permitted only two men to walk, and struck out eight. Long drives were not as frequent as they had been before, and the two that went far beyond the diamond were fielded perfectly and came at times when the bases were deserted. A hit, a passed ball, a stolen base, and a well-placed sacrifice netted a run for North Rutland in the second, and this was their only tally thus far.

"If we can hold 'em down now for three more licks, we 're all right," Lefty said to Tom, as they walked out on the diamond to begin the seventh. "Our fellows certainly are giving me fine support."

"Yes, and they 're hitting better, too," Tom replied. "I wish we could get another run or two. Our lead is n't big enough to make me feel safe."

The weak end of the batting list came up now, and Lefty struck out the first two men, while the third put up a little fly that Tom caught without moving more than six steps.

In the second half, Bert got a single, and Tom attempted a sacrifice which third fumbled clumsily in picking up. Tom, by a narrow margin, was safe on first, with Bert on second, and none out.

The pitcher eyed them sharply, as they took cautious leads, but Charlie at bat and Eliot "on deck" were weak in stick work, and he decided to get rid of them before doing anything else.

As he swung around to deliver the ball, Bert and Tom both started down the base line, running as if the game depended on it. Charlie swung viciously at the ball, and the best that the catcher could do was to smother it on the ground. He picked it up with all speed and threw it to third, but Bert already was sliding, and reached the base an instant before the ball landed in the baseman's glove.

Charlie struck out, but Eliot surprised himself and everybody else by sending the ball tearing along the ground just beyond the reach of first, who sprang to the right and stooped quickly to stop it.

Tom was almost to third by the time the ball struck the ground, and he quickly followed Bert across the plate.

A snappy double play ended the scoring, but five to one was not a bad lead, and hope reigned among the champions of Beaver Camp.

North Rutland scored again in the eighth, and had two men on bases in the ninth, when the last player went out on strikes. Beaver Camp added nothing to its tally, so the final score was five to two, in favor of the campers. Perhaps this explains why the cheers of the camp team were so much louder and more enthusiastic than they had been after the previous game.

"I feel more cheerful about my prospects of getting that peppermint stick," Tad remarked complacently, "but there are one or two weak spots in our team that we'll have to brace up before the final game," and his team-mates agreed with him.

Hard work and plenty of enthusiasm marked the interval before the final game, and Beaver Camp fared forth to North Rutland on the day appointed, prepared alike to battle for victory and to resist defeat, if such an outcome threatened.

Lefty was in his best form, and the campers gave him splendid support. Likewise, the North Rutland pitcher seemed almost invincible, and flawless fielding kept the bases clear. At the end of the seventh, not a run had been scored by either team.

Edgar opened the eighth with one of the best hits of the game—a long, hard drive, over center's head. This brought him to second.

Jack followed with a hot grounder that slipped between second's legs as he ducked to stop it, and Edgar went on to third.

Just as Tad stepped into the batter's box, the second baseman cried out in alarm, and pointed across the diamond.

The games at North Rutland were played on a level field just outside the village. Less than a hundred yards distant, behind third base, was a large red barn that turned its back disdainfully upon those who found time to play

baseball. Other buildings were grouped about it, but the barn itself was nearest the diamond. Now, as the boys looked in the direction indicated, they were startled to see a thin column of smoke coming out of a rear window.

The second baseman already was running toward the barn, and the others quickly followed. Edgar and Jack hesitated until Stover cried out, "Come on, fellows! Game called on account of fire!" Then they rushed to the rescue of the property.

The front doors of the barn were wide open, and the soft south breeze blowing through forced the smoke out of the rear windows. One side of the barn was almost completely filled with a great pile of hay, the top of which reached nearly to the roof timbers. The other side was nearly empty, but a small pile of old hay, left from the previous summer, was stacked on the floor. This was smoking and smoldering in a manner truly alarming. The campers feared that flames might leap up at any moment and set fire to the great pile of new, dry hay. In this case, it was hardly probable that the building could be saved.

"Smother the fire!" one of the natives cried.

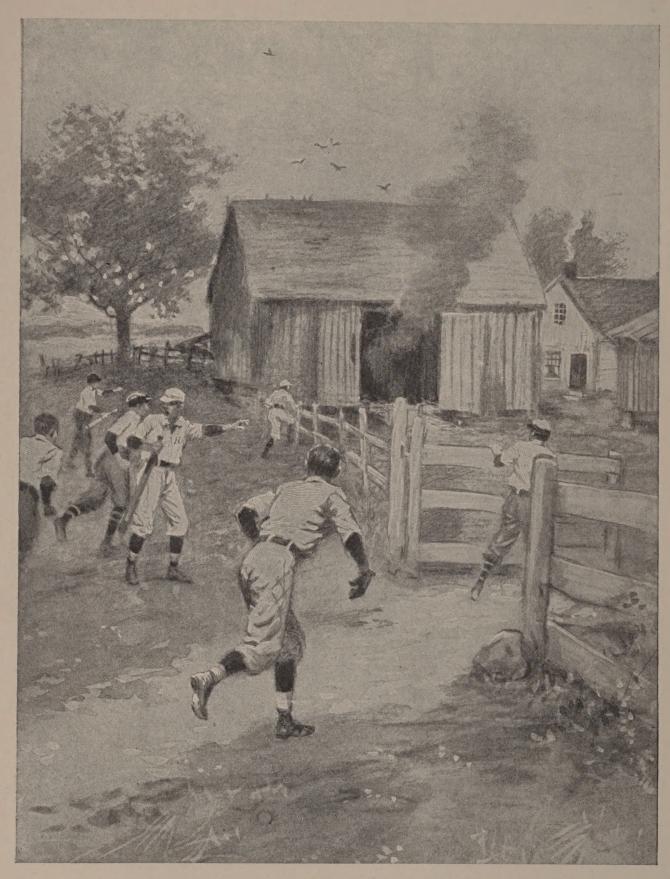
"Don't spread the hay out and let the air get at it, or the whole place will be afire!"

The boys crowded about, and began to beat the hay with their baseball bats and anything else near at hand that could be impressed into service, while two of the natives ran across to the stable for blankets.

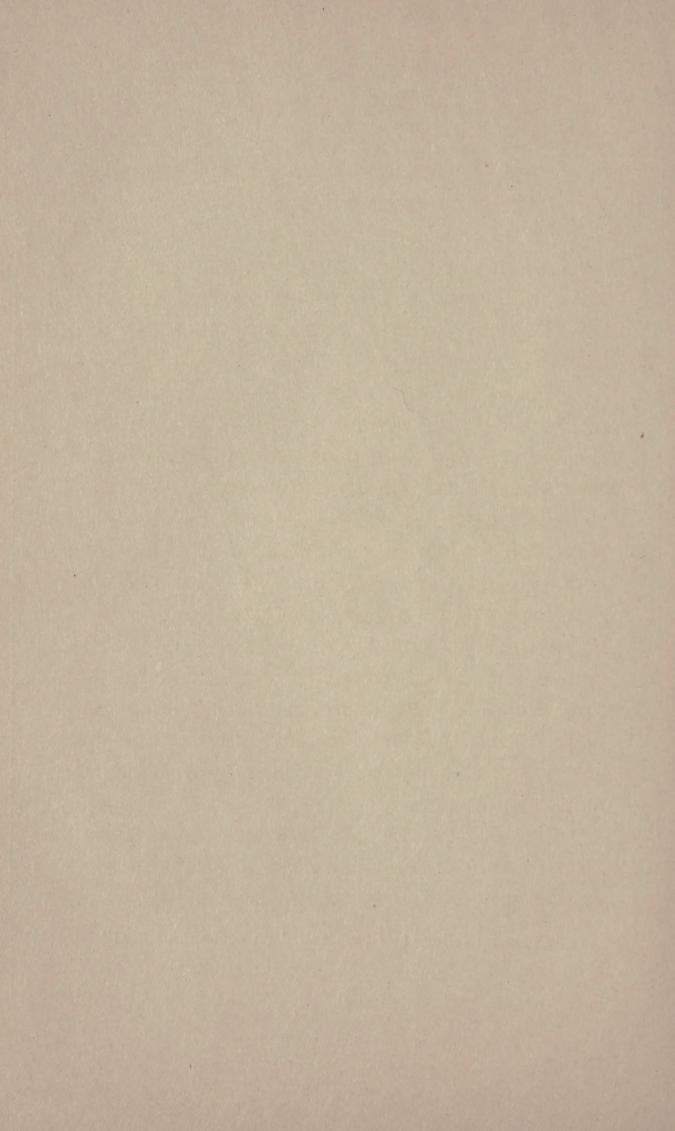
Fortunately, a trough filled with water stood in the barnyard, and it required but a few moments to find two large blankets, saturate them with water, and return to the fire. These wet blankets were thrown upon the pile of smoking hay, and, thus protected, the boys moved it out into the barnyard, using pitchforks and rakes which stood in a corner of the barn.

Once outside the building, they could breathe more freely, for all danger now was past. They were careful to beat out the flames whenever a burning wisp fell from the pile; and some of the boys remained on guard within the barn to watch for signs of fire breaking out elsewhere, while the others quickly scattered the hay around the yard, where the fire soon burned itself out.

In the midst of the excitement, the owner of the premises drove up with another load of hay.



"Come on fellows! Game called on account of fire!"



He was almost overcome with a mixture of emotions when he found the volunteer firefighters at work and learned of the possible loss which he so narrowly had escaped.

Without delay, he rushed inside the barn to assure himself of its safety, but, except for the smell of smoke and the charred floor timbers, there was no evidence of the danger which had menaced the building.

After he had recovered from the first effects of the shock, the farmer explained to them that the old hay had been taken out of the mow that morning, and stacked in the rear of the barn, in order that the new crop might be stored. In some way which he could not explain, a fire must have started inside the pile. Denied much air, it had smoked and smoldered, gradually eating its way upward and outward. The smoke found vent through the open window behind the pile. Probably the barn would have been in flames within a short time, if the discovery of the danger had been postponed for many minutes.

Of course, the farmer was profoundly grateful to the boys who had rendered such prompt and effective aid, and assured them that he al-

ways would be thankful that the ball field was so near his farm.

The boys went back to the interrupted game, after a time, when it was evident that nothing remained for them to do at the scene of danger overcome. By mutual consent, Edgar and Jack resumed their places on third and first bases, respectively, Tad went to bat, and the first half of the eighth inning was continued, with none out.

The pitcher had not recovered entirely from the effects of the excitement, so he gave Tad his base on balls, and then each base had a tenant.

Bert's long fly was caught, but Edgar dashed home, sliding to the plate in a cloud of dust just before the ball landed in the catcher's mitt.

"Safe!" cried the umpire, who had run in to see the play at close range, and the hosts of Beaver Camp raised an enthusiastic cheer.

Jack went on to third during the excitement, and seemed likely to stay there, for Lefty's attempted sacrifice was snapped up so quickly that Jack was driven back to third. Lefty was out at first, making the second out for the campers.

Things brightened when Tom brought Jack 292

home with a well-placed single, but here the scoring ended, for the next man struck out.

Lefty allowed but two hits when North Rutland went to bat, and neither produced a run, so the ninth inning opened with a score of two to nothing in favor of Beaver Camp.

The final round proved rather tame. The boys were tired, hot, and excited, not only as a result of the game, but partly on account of the unexpected interruption. The Beaver Campers failed to hit the ball safely, and were forced to depend upon their lead of two runs when their opponents advanced to do battle for the last time.

It soon became evident that they had nothing to fear. One of the North Rutland boys struck out, another hit to second, and the third went out on a short grounder.

After a complimentary exchange of cheers, the two teams separated, the vanquished to return home with sensational news of the fire, and the victors, led by Umpire Stover, to descend upon the general store in the village, where was to be purchased a prize to reward each player for the well-earned victory—a fat peppermint stick, adorned with a bright red spiral band.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CIRCUS COMES TO TOWN

"THAT farmer ought to be thankful we played to-day," Tad remarked, looking over toward the red barn. "If no one had been on the field, his barn would be just a heap of ashes now."

"And nearly an entire crop of hay, too," Eliot added. "I'm glad we could save it. The loss would be as bad for him as a store with a stock of goods for a man in that kind of business."

The Beaver Campers were returning after the game, each sucking a long, fat peppermint stick.

"I wonder what set it on fire," Walter said thoughtfully.

"Spontaneous combustion, most likely," Lefty explained glibly.

"Ah, indeed! How did it spontaneously 294

combust, Professor Lefty?" Tad asked in a tone of mock veneration.

"Well, children, you see the hay had been stored in a cool, dark corner, and when it was moved, naturally the motion made it warm. The hay that was thrown down first had all the rest piled on top of it, and you can imagine how hot that made it. By and by, it grew so hot that it commenced to blaze, but the hay near it was all in a perspiration, and this moisture kept the flames from spreading."

"Fine," Tad murmured. "Science is a wonderful thing!"

"Did you notice those two lanterns standing on a shelf just above the pile of old hay?" Stover inquired. "There was a covered matchbox on the shelf with them, and I saw a mouse scampering away toward his hole in the corner, when we were at work inside. A combination of mice and matches is rather dangerous in a barn, it seems to me."

"Mr. Farmer will have to be more careful in the future, I'm thinking," Jack declared. "It does n't do to take chances with such things."

Then they discussed the game just ended, 295

happy in the remembrance that victory had perched upon their banners, and feeling satisfied that they had fairly earned the prizes which were giving them so much present delight.

The next morning, Tad visited North Rutland, and came back in a state of wild excitement.

"Great doings!" he announced. "The circus is coming to town."

"Hurray!" Jack cried. "We 'll have to go, so as to take Cousin Willie. He 'll be anxious to see the circus, most likely, and of course it would never do to let the dear child go alone. The rest of us simply will have to sacrifice ourselves for his sake, whether we want to or not."

"When is it coming, Tad, and where?" Tom inquired.

"It will be over at Westport a week from Friday."

"That is well! We also will be over at Westport a week from Friday."

"That 'll make two circuses in town the same day," Lefty chuckled, but he was suppressed.

"I 've never been to a circus in the country," Edgar remarked. "It must be great!"

"If it's half as wonderful as the posters make out, it's worth going miles to see. They have trained elephants, tight-rope walkers, chariot races like the one in Ben Hur, trapeze performers who stand on their heads and wave a flag in mid-air—"

"Why don't they stand on their feet?" Lefty wanted to know. "I should think it would be easier."

"You can ask them when you get a chance. Then there's a great parade before the show. It's about ten miles long I should judge from the pictures. Elephants, camels, wild animals in cages, all kinds of chariot and band wagons, Columbia and Uncle Sam on a float, brave men and be-au-tiful ladies mounted on prancing steeds, dressed in bright red coats—"

"What's that? Prancing steeds dressed in bright red coats! How odd they must look!"

"Yes, and silk hats," Tad went on, unmindful of the interruption. "Clowns on donkeys, clowns in pony carts, clowns in disguise, and clowns in the parade. Oh, it is going to be a wonderful show!"

"Well, that's something pleasant to look forward to," Jack declared. "It'll be a lot of

fun to go to a circus up here. There's so much that you would n't get at a performance in the city."

"Yes, I suppose it's one of the really great events of the year," Doctor Halsey remarked. "Circus day and county fair week are occurrences which our neighbors anticipate with joy and recall with delight. These festal days and the arrival of people from the city during the vacation season help to break the monotony of life on the farm."

The Beaver Campers talked much about the circus during the time that intervened. Mrs. Spencer yielded to the entreaties of her daughters and nieces, and agreed to go with them. Stover and Rutledge immediately declared their intentions of joining the crowd of spectators, just as soon as the news of the approaching event reached them. Others from North Rutland were planning to be present. The circus spirit pervaded the atmosphere, and if there exists such a thing as a circus microbe, it certainly worked persistently in the district from which the circus managers hoped to draw patronage. Few persons escaped the infection, and it became apparent, as the days passed,

that farmers would leave their crops, and storekeepers their merchandise; that busy housewives would forsake cooking, mending, and all domestic cares in order to enjoy the "colossal aggregation of unparalleled wonders."

The Beaver Campers were making plans for a picnic luncheon at which Mrs. Spencer and the girls would be their guests, as would Stover and Rutledge. Indeed, it had become quite usual to include these jolly student friends of Doctor Halsey's whenever anything of special interest was being planned.

They expected to leave camp in the morning, cross the lake, eat luncheon in some pleasant spot, then have a long afternoon in which to enjoy the parade and, later, the first performance of the circus.

The great day came finally, though its coming seemed to have taken an unusually long time, and Beaver Camp was astir soon after sunrise. The weather-wise studied indications with some misgiving. There was a dull greenish-black cloudiness about the horizon, although the sun was shining. The air was extremely hot and humid. The surface of the lake was broken by only the tiniest of ripples,

and leaves hung limply on the motionless branches of the trees.

"Some hot!" groaned Lefty. "I wish we had an electric fan in camp."

"It would be comfortable to-day," Tom admitted. "I'm afraid we'll get thunder-showers before the day is over. Those clouds don't look very cheerful to me."

"Most likely you don't look very cheerful to them, either," Tad responded amiably. "If we get showers within a few miles of us, perhaps it will be cooler."

"If it gets real cold, I 'll want to borrow an overcoat," Jack announced. "Who has one that he 'll carry around for me until I need it?"

"Well, of all cheerful nerves!" Lefty gasped. "If you feel that way about it, why not try carrying a thin coat of paint?"

"I hope the showers will be real obliging, and stay away until after we eat," Eliot remarked. "It would be hard to find a sheltered spot, with such a lot of people in town, all looking for the same thing."

"Yes, rain would spoil the eats," Charlie said anxiously, casting a searching look around 300

the horizon and overhead. "It may not strike us. The sun is out now."

Owners of launches and small steamers were driving a brisk trade from across the lake to points near the circus grounds. The boys had made arrangements with the owner of a launch to have his boat call for Mrs. Spencer and the girls, then stop at the camp landing for them about ten o'clock.

They ran up the signal on a little flag-pole at the end of the camp landing, and awaited the coming of the launch.

"I wonder what's happened," Bert said presently, looking up and down the lake. "He was to call at the Spencer's before ten o'clock, then come right down here. I don't see a sign of his old scow, and it's ten minutes after ten now."

"Lots of things might have happened," Lefty responded consolingly. "The boiler might have burst and knocked the gallant ship into smithereens, or a swordfish might have jabbed its sticker into it and sunk the frail craft, or maybe a whale upset it. Let's be calm, and not blame the hardy skipper for the delay until we're sure it's his fault."

"You always make such cheerful suggestions," Tom laughed. "I think most likely he 's waiting up at Mrs. Spencer's landing for the girls to get ready."

"You betray a remarkable knowledge of the ways of the fair sex," Jack declared. "It does take girls an endless while to fix up when they re going anywhere, that is a fact!"

"How extremely ungallant!" Tad sighed. "I think the old skipper is doing a land office business carting people across the lake, and probably has forgotten all about us."

"Well, let's hang around a while and see if he appears," Edgar suggested. "He may show up a little later, and we still have twenty minutes or so to spare."

So they waited. They fretted and waited some more. They grew increasingly impatient, but still they waited. They kept on waiting. Then they grew desperate and resolved to cease waiting. Lefty volunteered to row up to Mrs. Spencer's landing and see the guests safely embarked on any craft that could be hailed. This done, he was to return to camp, and the boys would get across any way they could.

After a time, Lefty was observed in the distance, returning with all speed.

"Well, did you get 'em started?" Tom called.

Lefty shook his head.

"What's up? Aren't they going?"

Lefty rested on his oars, and the boat floated in near the landing.

"No one was around the place," he reported.

"House all closed up?"

"Yes, as tight as a drum, and not a sign of anybody on the premises."

There was a moment of silence while the campers reviewed the situation.

"Well," Tom announced finally, "I think they re across the lake waiting for us. Maybe the old skipper got mixed up, and took em over before he called for us. There comes a little launch. Let's hail it! There's just about room enough for us all to squeeze in, but we can't take Stover and Rutledge. They'll surely think we're lost somewhere. We promised to call for them, you remember."

Doctor Halsey agreed that the suggestion was good, so a united shout was raised, accompanied with a vigorous waving of arms, and

other violent gestures suggestive of an Indian sun dance. A shrill toot from the whistle of the diminutive craft told them that their signals had been heard. Then the bow swung around and pointed toward the camp landing.

"There hardly will be room enough on board for all of us," the doctor declared, looking doubtfully at the approaching boat. "Perhaps the owner will tow one of our rowboats behind. Then we can pack our luncheon in it, with two or three of us to prevent it from escaping."

The skipper of the craft good-naturedly agreed (for a consideration), to tow the larger of the two camp boats, so it was made fast to the stern of the launch, and the campers accepted his invitation to "pile in."

Lefty, Tom, and Tad sat in the rowboat. The others crowded on board the launch, and slowly they chugged across the lake, reaching the eastern shore at about half-past eleven.

Roads were thronged with vehicles of many varieties, and people fairly swarmed in the direction of the circus tents.

"I think that when Stover and Rutledge found that we were not in sight at the time when we'd agreed to call for them, they made

up their minds that something had happened," Eliot remarked. "I believe we shall find them over here somewhere."

"It 'll be hard work," Jack declared in a perplexed tone. "We think Mrs. Spencer and the girls are here, too, but there 's such a mob that it 's going to be next to impossible to find any one we know."

"Never give up!" Lefty exclaimed impressively. "Just keep moving and looking. We're pretty sure to run across them. It would n't surprise me a bit to find Stover in a clown's suit, helping to make the circus really funny."

About fifteen minutes later, they were walking along a road that led back from shore toward the circus tents. Suddenly, a familiar voice hailed them from a shady retreat, and, quickly looking around, they discovered Mrs. Spencer and the four girls sitting upon light shawls spread on the grass. With them, as calm and cool (well, perhaps not cool, considering the temperature, but untroubled, certainly), as if the original arrangement had been exactly carried out, sat Stover and Rutledge.

"Greetings!" cried Stover. "Salutations

and a cordial welcome! We 've been waiting for you to bring the lunch."

"You fellows certainly do beat all! How did you get here and how long have you been waiting?"

"How did we get here? Why, your old friend Charon, the boatman, called for us, just as we arranged yesterday."

"He did!"

"He was very prompt," Mrs. Spencer added. "He called at our landing before half-past nine. Fortunately, we were all ready. There were a number of passengers on board, and we wondered where all you Beaver Campers would find room. The launch did not stop at your landing, however, but kept right on down the lake until Mr. Samuelson's dock was reached. Here Mr. Stover and Mr. Rutledge came on board. After that, we were taken straight across the lake, and we supposed that the captain intended to call for you on his next trip. We have waited for you in this cool, quiet nook which Mr. Rutledge's sharp eyes discovered for us."

"Well, wouldn't that jar you?" Lefty 306

gasped. "The ancient mariner never came near us."

Then they drew graphic word pictures of their agitation and mental distress, and reported the sore trials and tribulations through which they had passed. Mrs. Spencer, ably assisted by the girls, expressed such hearty sympathy that they were comforted, and settled themselves in the shade to rest.

The land on one side of the road sloped upward rather abruptly for eight or ten feet, being level on top of the rise, and well shaded. Here the party settled itself as comfortably as space permitted. In the distance could be seen the white tents of the circus, and, as the parade would soon pass along the road below on its way to the town beyond, they decided to eat luncheon there, and await the "grand, glittering display of public pageantry."

"Ah!" Stover cried suddenly, pausing with a sandwich mid-way to its destruction. "Sounds of martial music smite my ears. The monster street parade must have started."

Sure enough, a procession of red wagons, gaily ornamented with gold leaf, was rolling out of the big tent. The band rode in the first

chariot, and certainly worked hard in an endeavor to let people know that the parade had started. Onward it moved, nearer and nearer to the party under the trees.

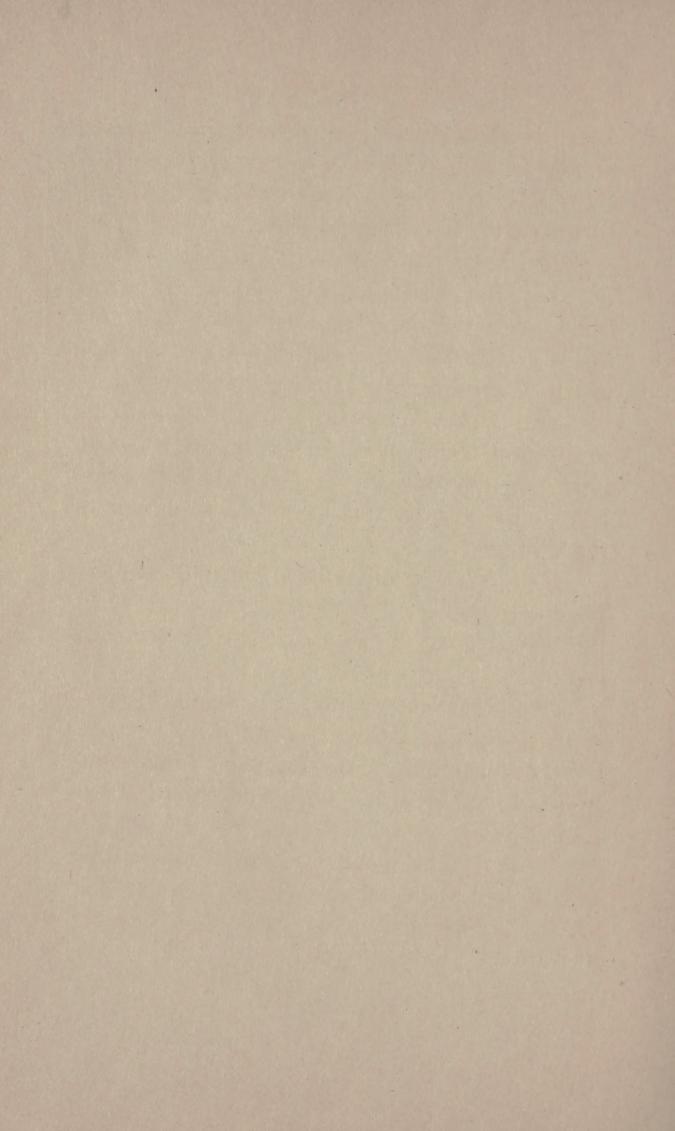
Stover rose, assumed the manner of a ringmaster, and began to explain the features of the procession for the benefit of his grinning audience.

"First, ladies and gentlemen, we have a bewildering bit of bewitching band. Next, you will kindly observe the gorgeous galaxy of glittering glory, gregariously grouped. Now approaches the ponderous procession of prepossessing pachyderms. Next in line, we have a disgusting drove of dilapidated dromedaries, together with a colossal class of celebrated camels. We now see before us some savage specimens of untamed animals. Keep your seats, ladies! There is no danger. Here we have a terrifying, tempestuous tiger. Now, a wild, wilful wolf. Next, a languorous, lacerating lion. Then comes a huge, haughty hippopotamus. In the next cage, a ravenous, raging rhinoceros. Finally, a gigantic, garrulous giraffe.

"Now upon the scene enter the brave riders 308



Stover rose and began to explain the features of the procession



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and fair rideresses. And behold the prancing steeds! Observe the ease and grace with which they are controlled! Notice the spirited picture which is here presented!

"Here come the clowns—joy of youth, solace of age. See their antics, wild and frantic. Mark their curiously painted faces—no, they already have been marked! Comical, curious, clever, charming, captivating, consoling—

"Ah! Here is the familiar tail-end of the procession! Our loud-voiced friend, the calliope. Vociferous music! Would n't it sound odd if they played 'Sweet and Low' on one of those things?

"Well, that's all of the parade. Hadn't we better amble along toward the tents? We want time to buy some peanuts before the show begins."

The others were willing, even eager, to start, so they walked leisurely along the road toward the circus grounds. Already, dark clouds were rolling together in the west, and the wind was rising.

"We 're going to have a storm before long, I'm afraid," Doctor Halsey said, a bit anxiously. "The tent is supposed to be water-

proof, so I suppose we 'll keep dry, but I wonder if it is put up strongly enough to be safe."

"Why, they must strike storms quite often," Tad remarked consolingly. "If there's any way of making a tent storm-proof, I dare say the circus folks know all about it."

"We'll be careful to sit under a spot that does n't leak," Jack added. "It diverts your interest to have water splashing down on your noble dome."

They reached the circus grounds after a short walk, and purchased their tickets. Already, people were gravitating toward the ticket wagon, going thence into the menagerie, and on to the main tent.

"Most of the animals are out helping to lengthen the parade," Eliot observed, looking around the almost-deserted tent.

"Peanuts!" shouted a raucous voice close at hand. "Here's where you get your double-jointed, knock-kneed, pigeon-toed, hump-backed, Rocky Mountain peanuts."

Stover regarded the vociferous vendor with envy unmistakable, and then purchased a liberal quantity, as a silent tribute to his vocal genius.

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They procured programs, and hunted up their seats. Then they employed the time before the show began in munching peanuts, bombarding one another with the shells, and studying the announcements made in the program.

Presently, sounds of stirring music were heard outside. Nearer and nearer they came. Finally, with a crash of cymbals and a vigorous thumping of drums, the parade returned from its invasion of the town, and moved ponderously around the tent.

Then the first numbers on the program were started in motion, and the three rings were scenes of interest and activity. Event followed event in rapid succession. Clowns performed all manner of droll antics. Horses danced gracefully to the music of waltzes and two-steps. Trapeze artists exhibited such skill and daring that more than one spectator gasped apprehensively; and races of several varieties thrilled the excited watchers. Animals more or less wild gave convincing demonstrations of man's power over the brute creation, and—

Suddenly, a long rumble of thunder made itself heard above the varied noises of the circus.

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Sharp flashes of lightning could be seen through the canvas, and the wind blew with increasing violence, whirling papers and even small objects around, in the confusion that precedes a storm.

The performance continued just as if the hot July sun still shone and not a cloud was in the sky. A vague restlessness, however, made itself apparent among the spectators. A few sought the exits. Others looked about them with undisguised apprehension. Attention was diverted from the rings.

"Shall we stay here, Mrs. Spencer, or seek some safer shelter?" the doctor inquired politely.

"I think we are quite safe," she replied quietly. "If we go outside, we shall be exposed to the full fury of the storm. It may be only a thunder-shower, you know. Perhaps the sun will be shining again before the performance is over."

The others had secretly hoped that her decision would be of this nature, so of course the party waited. Meanwhile, the thunder rolled nearer and louder. The lightning flashes followed one another in rapid succession, and the

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wind gathered increasing strength. Now the rain came pattering and splashing down about the tent.

All at once, there came a blinding flash of lightning, followed almost immediately by a deafening clap of thunder. At the same time, the flaming lights in the middle of the tent went out.

Women screamed in terror, and some of the spectators hastily fled toward the exits. Fortunately, the lights still burned brightly at either end of the tent, and nothing like a panic resulted, though many were visibly nervous and alarmed.

The Beaver Campers hastened to reassure Mrs. Spencer and the girls, who were outwardly calm and brave in spite of any misgiving which they may have felt.

Soon after the accident, the performance concluded abruptly, but most of the spectators kept their seats, choosing this shelter in preference to the discomforts of the world outside.

The bolt of lightning that put out the lights inside the tent marked the climax of the storm. Now the thunder was rolling faintly in the distance, the lightning flashes were becoming less

frequent, and the rain was falling more gently than it had during the worst of the shower.

"Well, this has been a great day!" Stover remarked cheerfully. "Who ever heard of another circus that presented acts not advertised or entered on the program?"

"That was the real thing," Rutledge added.
"The best of scenic artists could hardly produce anything quite as realistic as that storm was."

"That's right, but it seems to be about over now," Tom announced. "See how many people are going out. Suppose we follow the crowd."

The others were not at all reluctant to move about after the long session on the hard seats, so they joined the slowly moving throng, and, by the time they had reached the outer air, the rain had ceased entirely, and sunshine was putting the dark clouds to rout.

There was some delay about getting across the lake, owing to the large number of people who were anxious to get over to the opposite shore in the comparatively few boats that were available. In spite of the delay, they reached the camp landing before sunset, and here the

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boys left the launch, while Mrs. Spencer and the girls remained on board to be carried up to their home.

As the Beaver Campers walked up the path, Lefty broke in upon the animated conversation with an exclamation of dismay.

"What's the matter, Lefty?" the doctor asked, in sudden alarm.

"Oh, we'll have to sleep standing up," was the doleful response. "All the cots stood out there on the piazza during that storm, and with a strong west wind driving the rain before it in sheets, I can see their finish."

And the others, without any difficulty, saw the same thing.

CHAPTER XVII

AN HISTORICAL PILGRIMAGE

"I WONDER if we can't take a little trip while we 're up in this region," Bert said one evening, as the Beaver Campers sat around the camp-fire.

"Easiest thing in the catalogue," Lefty assured him. "Tie a string about six inches from the ground across that path from the landing, and somebody will surely take a good trip."

"I believe it will be a good thing, for several reasons," the doctor declared heartily.

"It will, undoubtedly," Lefty responded, with equal heartiness. "For instance, it will illustrate the force of gravitation."

"No, no! I was talking of the trip."

"Well, that 's what I was talking of."

"Where could we go?" Tom interposed hastily, fearing that the humorous word-play

might draw attention away from the original subject under consideration.

"There is such a variety of possible trips that it is hard to make a selection," Doctor Halsey said slowly. "We can go back into the mountains of Vermont, or up north to St. Alban's Bay—even farther, if you feel so disposed—with a side trip to Ausable Chasm. We can travel westward to Keene Valley, and get up into the Adirondacks, or we can go southward through country wonderfully rich in historical interest. North—south—east—west—the world is ours."

"It sounds too much like winter to talk of going south," Jack observed. "It 'll be time enough to do that when the snow begins to fly. That trip up the lake, stopping at Ausable Chasm, sounds good to me."

"Yes, I'd like to see that chasm while we're in this section," Tom said eagerly. "It must be great! All kinds of funny rocks, and waterfalls, and natural bridges, and rapids where you go shooting along in a boat—"

"It must be a gunboat, if you go shooting along in it," Tad observed, and his brother promptly rolled him over backward.

"What is there to see down the lake?" Jack asked.

"Well, there are the ruins of two forts-"

"Ruins! Huh! If you want to see ruins, just look over the dinner table when we get through."

"There is a monument at Schuylerville worth going miles to see."

"Oh, yes! The monument is what I meant," Lefty asserted.

"Then there is the famous Revolutionary battle-field of Saratoga."

"Any ice-cream stores and moving picture shows?"

"Really, I don't know! I think it's likely you might find some."

"You can keep right on going, if you once get started south," Bert announced. "There's nothing to stop you. Just sail down the lake, and the Champlain Canal, then into the Hudson River, and so on into the ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, and—er—what comes after that?"

"Panama Canal," Lefty suggested help-fully. "Through that into the Pacific Ocean, up into the Arctic Ocean, and down by way of the St. Lawrence River and other things until

you get back to the starting point. A real jolly trip!"

"It's all very well to talk of taking trips," Edgar objected, "but where 's the money coming from? It costs a heap to go gallivanting around the country."

"Gallivanting is a Greek word, is n't it?"

Tad inquired innocently. "It has a foreign sound."

Edgar nodded. "It comes from the Greek root galli, meaning traveling, and vanting, meaning the same thing," he explained. "Repeated for emphasis, you see."

"Well, if it's going to cost much, I see where this chicken scratches in his own farm-yard," Lefty declared. "My income, gentlemen, is limited only by the size of my pocket-book."

"And you have n't any pocketbook," Tom chuckled.

"Nor any income, either."

"It ought not to cost so much," Eliot said thoughtfully. "There are certain things that we have to buy every day. I should n't think it would matter much whether we pay for them here or somewhere else."

"I suppose not—as long as we pay," Tom responded. "We 've done well so far. I went over our accounts with the doctor a few days ago, and found that we had enough money left to carry us through the rest of the season and leave a balance over for emergencies."

"That comes to me," Lefty informed them, "I lost my balance yesterday."

"We have n't enough boats to carry the crowd," Cousin Willie now suggested, "and you would n't want to row so far, would you?"

"No. That 's too much of a pull," Bert declared. "We might do it in canoes, if we had enough of them."

"I saw a dandy gasoline launch for rent the other day," Tom announced. "The owner wants five dollars a day for it, though."

"In this dark vale of tears, people don't always get what they want," Tad reminded him. "If we bid twenty-five dollars a week, I think we stand a good show of getting it. Maybe we can work him for a cash discount, too, if we pay in advance."

"Yes, but even if you get it, who 's going to be the engineer?" Jack wanted to know.

"Can any fellow here run the engine or manage the steering apparatus?"

"Stover can," the doctor announced. "He knows all about engines and gasoline launches and such things. He's cruised around quite a bit in one sort or another."

"I see where he gets asked to go with us, then," Jack observed. "It's likely we'd have wanted him and Rutledge in the crowd, anyhow, for they follow us around just like Mary's little lamb. Really, I think they spend more time down here than they do at Samuelson's where they're supposed to be staying. We'll have to give them a special invitation to go traveling with us."

"They won't need much urging," Doctor Halsey assured them. "You can depend upon their prompt and enthusiastic acceptance of your invitation."

"That's settled then," Jack remarked with evident satisfaction. "We have a boat in view, and some one to run it. Now where 'll we go?"

"There are reasons why I think we 'd better postpone our trip north until later," the doctor responded. "We 'll see Ausable Chasm and

the northern part of the lake before we go home, but not just now."

"Hist! a mystery!" Tad muttered.

"That trip south is all right," Tom assured them. "Let's see, we sail right down the lake until we strike the Champlain Canal, don't we?"

The doctor nodded. "Yes, that's right! After that, you can continue indefinitely. How long a trip do you fellows want to take?"

"Let's hire the boat for a week, if we can get a special rate that way," Tom suggested. "Then we can start on Monday, and come back when we feel like it."

"You 'll have to feel like it when the week 's up, whether you really feel that you feel like it or not," Tad declared with much feeling, "because if you don't feel like it, most likely your conscience will make you feel that you ought to be sort of feeling your way back, so 's not to hurt anybody's feelings."

"Piffle! just listen to the oracle," Lefty cried. "Being out in the hot sun too much makes people talk that way. What 's good for that complaint, Doctor?"

"Try a flaxseed poultice at the base of the 324

brain," the doctor advised with a laugh. "That's an old-fashioned remedy, but it's a good one."

After considerable discussion, they arranged a plan for the proposed trip, "subject to change without notice," like a time-table.

Tom, Tad, and Jack were appointed a committee to locate the man who desired to rent his motor boat, and see what terms could be arranged with him. The doctor agreed to consult Stover and Rutledge, map out their course, and discuss transportation items. Bert, Lefty, and Cousin Willie were given charge of the commissary department, and instructed to look over the supplies on hand and make a list of things needed. The others had general commissions to examine every source of information at their disposal, in order to discover matters of historical interest related to the country through which they would pass.

The proposal to journey eastward into the mountains of Vermont, or westward into the Adirondacks received scant consideration, for either trip would necessarily have to be made on foot, and a long tramp in hot weather did not strongly appeal to the campers. Perhaps

they might have regarded the idea more favorably if they could have walked without burdens, but the prospect of toiling onward mile after mile, with a heavy pack upon each back and the sun pouring its rays generously upon the party, certainly was not alluring.

The rest of the week was spent in preparation. They secured the use of the launch for six days at a cost of twenty-five dollars, and expected to leave camp early on Monday morning, returning Saturday night. Stover and Rutledge, as the doctor had predicted, were highly enthusiastic over the proposed trip, and suggested that they travel as far southward as Albany, stopping on the way whenever it was desired to examine any point of interest, and returning thence without pausing for sight-seeing. Supplies were purchased, preparations were fully made, and then the hour of departure was awaited with restless impatience.

Monday morning dawned fair and warm. The launch was lying at the camp landing, having been brought thither soon after daylight, and the first duty of the campers was to carry their supplies on board. They worked busily,

and before nine o'clock everything was ready for a start.

The Beaver Campers had discussed routes and plans until they felt fully competent to arrange "personally conducted tours" for any one in need of such service. It had finally been decided to follow the suggestion of Stover, and travel as far southward as Albany, provided they were favored with good weather, and thus permitted to get as far from home as the distant terminal point.

Mrs. Spencer and the four girls came down to witness their departure, and to wish the travelers a pleasant trip. This somewhat delayed the beginning of the cruise, as the boys seemed a bit reluctant to leave the shore. In time, however, each took his place in the launch, and Stover busied himself with a maze of wheels and levers which looked wonderfully complex to eyes unaccustomed to such things. Then the whistle tooted a shrill farewell, parting words with those on shore were exchanged, and the *Rainbow* moved away from the landing and pointed its bow toward the south.

"I wonder why they named this boat Rainbow," Tom ventured.

"Because you would n't see it if we never had rain," Edgar suggested.

"It's a reminder of Noah and the Ark," Tad responded impressively. "The rainbow is an arc, you know."

"Oh, sure! I surrender!" Tom gasped, raising his hands in a gesture of helplessness. "Well, anyhow, I hope the name of our ship is a proof that all storms are over for a while."

Rutledge was steering, with Lefty and Eliot watching him carefully and learning how to handle the wheel. Bert and the doctor were listening to Stover's explanation of the engine, and the uses of various wheels, levers, and other mechanical devices.

"It looks simple," Bert remarked.

"Why, yes," Stover assured him. "It's just a matter of doing the right thing at the right time. Try it a while, Bert! Nothing like practice, you know. She's running all right now, and we have a clear stretch ahead."

Bert settled himself to watch the engine as a physician might study a critical case. Stover wiped his hands on some cotton waste, and walked forward. He faced the boys, assuming the manner of a lecturer, and began:

"Gentlemen and fellow-Rainbow-chasers, I desire to call your attention to the beautiful and highly interesting country through which we are passing. On the left, you see the State of Vermont, with the Green Mountains in the distance. Here it is that the famous green cheese is prepared, from which the moon is made. Vermont is famous for many things, among which are quarries, maple sugar, and Beaver Camp.

"On your right, you see the State of New York, with the Adirondacks standing out in bold relief against the—er—the cerulean blue. Adirondacks is an Indian word, meaning high. This refers not only to the altitude of these famous mountains but also to the charges levied by keepers of summer hotels and camps."

"Where did you get your translation?" the doctor demanded.

"An old Indian gave it to me," was the undisturbed response. "For many years, he has stood in front of a cigar store in my native city and is an authority on such matters."

"It would n't surprise me to hear that you made it up yourself, as you went along," Eliot remarked with a laugh. "The guide-book says

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that Adirondacks is a name that the Iroquois gave the Algonquins. It means 'he eats bark.'"

"Suit yourself," Stover remarked amiably. "Translations never bother me in the least. As I was about to remark, ladies and gentlemen, we are approaching a district where the patriotic Continental troops, often footsore and hungry—"

"They 're not the only ones who felt the pangs of hunger around these parts," Lefty interrupted. "Save the rest of your speech until after lunch, Stover. We'll be in better shape to endure it then."

"All right," Stover agreed good-naturedly, "but don't fool yourselves with the idea that it is going to spoil my appetite, thereby leaving that much more for some one else. I always eat twice as much when I have a speech to make later."

"There's a spot that looks good to me!" Edgar cried. "See! Right over there on that shady bank."

Rutledge took the wheel, and guided the boat close to the high, well-shaded bank of a little cove. This was a pleasant location, and no

habitation was near, so the campers felt perfectly safe in going ashore and making themselves at home.

Their first meal consisted largely of peanut butter sandwiches, crackers, and apples, which a kind neighbor furnished, involuntarily, from his orchard near by. In the midst of the feast, sounds of approaching footsteps reached their ears, and presently a short, stout, red-faced man, together with a tall, raw-boned male companion appeared on the scene.

"What 'r' you doin' here?" cried the man with the Italian sunset complexion. "Can't you read the signs I put up, warning tresp'ssers to keep off these here premises?"

The men drew nearer, one angrily and with a strong suggestion of violence; the other diffidently and with extreme reluctance.

Stover sprang to his feet with every appearance of alarm, and waved the pair back with gestures that were wild and violent, as if made by one laboring under intense excitement.

"Don't come any closer if you value your health," he exclaimed. "We are three doctors who are taking these boys south. I'm not going to tell you the reason why we are doing

this, because I have no wish to spread wild rumors around the neighborhood and cause a panic. I'll just warn you to keep at least twenty-five feet away. You may be able to guess the reason why I tell you this."

The men stopped. The avenger stepped back a yard, his companion fully six.

"Don't linger in the atmosphere," Stover continued very earnestly, "because you know not what the consequences may be. The air is full of germs, and even now my practiced eye tells me that one is about to attack your left ear."

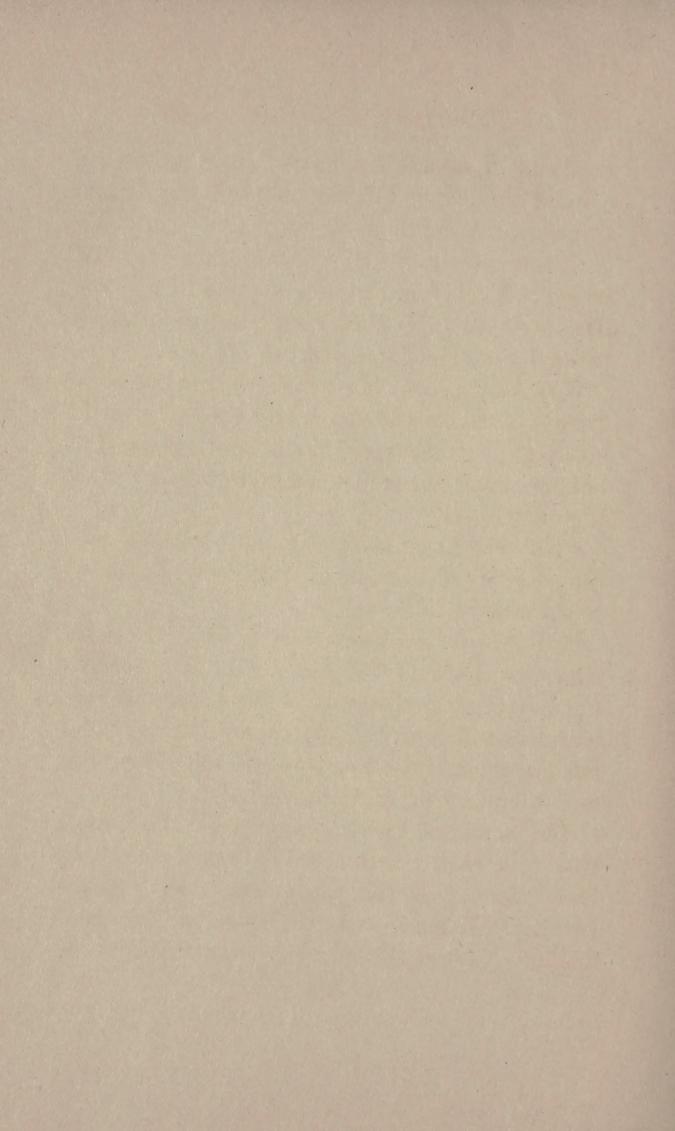
(It really was a mosquito, but it served Stover's purpose quite as well as the deadliest of microbes.)

The thin man retreated at least ten feet further, but the other held his ground.

"I'll have the law on you!" he vowed excitedly. "You watch 'em, Hiram! Don't let 'em get into that 'ere boat, whatever happens. I'll go and get the constable. When I put up those signs warning everybody to keep away from my apples, I vowed and declared I'd make an example of the first ones that trespassed on these 'ere premises," and he shook



"Don't come any closer if you value your health"



his head in savage emphasis. Then he swung around and strode off, leaving the lanky Hiram to guard the captives of war.

Stover seated himself with a gesture of resignation. Then, suddenly, he started to his feet, drew a small knife from his pocket, and walked toward the frightened guard.

"As long as you have to stay around here, Hiram, I advise you to be vaccinated," he said soberly. "Of course, it will be very painful, but it is much the safest course to follow. Now if you will—"

"Go 'way from me!" screamed Hiram, stepping backward in sheer terror. "Help! Help! Keep away I tell you!"

Still Stover walked slowly toward the man, who now was helpless with terror, and utterly unmindful of anything but the presence of this awful doctor who seemed capable of carrying out the mysterious directions he was giving for the safeguarding of Hiram's health.

The campers took advantage of this situation, and hastily scrambled on board the *Rainbow*. Stover heard the noise, and, quickly turning his head, saw that they had escaped. Then he backed slowly away from Hiram, sud-

denly turned, and, with a cry of warning to those in the boat, ran at top speed down the bank and leaped on board.

Hiram was too greatly bewildered to realize how he had been outwitted. He did venture down to the shore, and uttered threats that grew bolder as the boat sailed away, but he took no steps to prevent their departure.

"Another battle of Lake Champlain, in which the enemy has been completely routed by strategy," Stover announced gravely.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to take advantage of such a timid, trustful creature," Doctor Halsey said severely.

"I am!" Stover confessed. "Watch me blush! It was very naughty, and I 'll never do it again, but really it was the best thing I could think of on the spur of the moment, and, let me tell you, Brother Halsey, you ran just as fast as any one when my—er—well, call it strategy, provided a means of escape."

Then there was a general laugh, and Doctor Halsey had nothing further to say.

During the afternoon, the party explored Crown Point and Fort Ticonderoga, trying to recall the stirring scenes which the crumbling

walls had witnessed, as they rambled over the historic ground.

The fort at Ticonderoga had been restored to a condition as nearly as possible like that of Revolutionary days, and the boys spent considerable time in exploring the interesting building.

They camped that night along the south-eastern shore, near the foot of the lake, beginning the day on Tuesday with an early bath in the cool water.

The second day of their cruise found them at Schuylerville. They discovered trolley cars here and moving picture shows, yet there was much of the old colonial life suggested by the architecture of several venerable houses and by other features of interest preserved from the time when the nation was in its infancy. Here, too, they saw the impressive Saratoga Battle Monument, and took time to climb to its top, studying as they went the bronze tablets set in the walls, depicting stirring incidents of the American Revolution. When they mounted the last stair, they forgot the weariness of the ascent in their enjoyment of the rarely magnificent panorama spread out below. North—

south—east—west—every direction revealed a picture of surpassing beauty, and the campers were reluctant to leave.

The party spent more than two hours in drowsy old Schuylerville, going thence to Bemis Heights. Here they wandered over the Saratoga battle-field, where an engagement of decisive importance occurred during the Revolution. Aided by monuments which mark important spots, and by memories of the unusually clear and interesting report of this battle which they recently had read in Lossing's "Fieldbook of the American Revolution" borrowed from the nearest library, the Beaver Campers were able to live over again in imagination this stirring battle.

This ended the sightseeing for the day. Wednesday morning was dull and cloudy, with heavy showers at intervals, so they took refuge in Stillwater, and held a council of war.

"It looks to me as if it might clear up this afternoon," the doctor announced hopefully. "Then we can continue our cruise toward the capital of New York State."

"New York has two capitals," Lefty reminded him, "N and Y."

The doctor's cheerful prediction was fulfilled. By one o'clock in the afternoon, the sun was shining brightly, and soon they were on their way. Wednesday night found them in Troy, and most of Thursday was spent in exploring that city and Albany.

On Friday morning, they started back toward camp, "all well, all happy, and all broke," as Lefty cheerfully reminded them.

"Yes, we've blown in all our surplus," Tom observed, "but we 've seen a lot of things that we 'll never forget. Believe me, it was worth all it cost."

Saturday brought them back to Beaver Camp, and Stover agreed to take the launch back to the landing of its owner, so the campers grouped themselves on the shore and watched the boat until it disappeared from sight around a point to the north.

"That 's the way all rainbows fade," Tad remarked. "They 're beautiful for a while, then they disappear, and you have only memories."

"That 's right!" Lefty agreed. "Memories and appetites! I wonder if there 's anything in the bungalow to eat."

And they hurried up to investigate.

CHAPTER XVIII

"BY THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON"

THE week that followed the trip was spent quietly at Beaver Camp. Lefty remarked that the only active thing about the place was the practice of economy. This was in daily evidence, and by a little self-denial and prudent management, the camp finances once more approached a condition resembling the Rock of Gibraltar in strength and solidity. Nor were the campers depressed by the economical policies in force. On the contrary, they made merry over privation, and kept up a friendly rivalry to see who could suggest the most thrifty idea or the plan that promised to save the largest amount.

Of course, the time was not spent in idleness. Every day found the boys in the lake or on it—generally both. The enthusiastic anglers fished to their hearts' content. Those who enjoyed tramping explored fields and roads with-

"BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON"

in a radius of ten miles. Cousin Willie took a number of pictures and developed several rolls of films under the guidance and direction of his senior partner, Lefty.

In the city, Cousin Willie had his developing and printing done for him, so that he might be spared annoyance, labor, and possible stains from the chemicals used. Up here at camp, however, Lefty had persuaded the boy to undertake this work himself, and the results which their combined labor produced gave the junior partner unbounded delight and satisfaction. They developed the films in a tank, and printed the negatives on blue-print post cards, which the others were eager to purchase. Indeed, Beaver Camp felt very high-toned and exclusive because it had post cards "grown on the premises," as Lefty said.

The intimacy between these two campers which had commenced at the beginning of the camp season had been of inestimable value in developing Cousin Willie. Lefty was just the ideal companion for such a boy—strong of body, clean of mind, patient, kind-hearted, and irrepressibly cheerful. In fact, he was the living embodiment of certain lines of conduct

which Cousin Willie had begun to cherish just before coming to Beaver Camp, and for the active possession of which he had resolved to strive with might and main.

Tad and Tom were quick to see the change in their cousin, and were beyond measure amazed, for they had so long known an entirely different sort of boy. Instead of being jealous of Lefty's influence over his partner, they rejoiced in the emancipation of the boy from babyhood, and did all they could to encourage him.

The other campers, too, seemed to realize that the boy was doing his best to show the proper spirit, and they admired him for it. Instead of having in their ranks a babyish, selfish, spoiled child, who must be treated with tolerant patience, and a sort of contemptuous kindness, as they had anticipated, they found a happily different specimen with which to deal. They accepted Cousin Willie for what he tried to be, and treated him exactly as they did any other camper, which fact filled him with whole-hearted contentment and gave him encouragement to keep up the good work. He was supremely happy now. He had put on

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camp. His face was round, rosy, and bronzed by sun and wind. Moreover, he had lost his feeling of restless discontent and his air of bored indifference. Gone, too, was his languid, luxury-loving manner. The natural boy within him had awakened, and did not seem likely to be lulled into slumber very soon.

All the Beaver Campers appeared to be in perfect health. For nearly two months, they had lived a simple, healthful life out-of-doors, and Nature had richly rewarded them for following her precepts. Much of the time, they wore sleeveless jerseys which exposed their arms and shoulders to Nature's bronzing processes, and there was not a trace of "city pallor" in the tanned faces and arms.

One evening, as the boys were gathered about the supper-table, Tom seized upon an opportunity when conversation lulled, and made a sudden announcement.

"I have an idea!"

"Well, we 're glad to know it," his brother assured him, "but if you had n't mentioned the fact, none of us would have suspected it. Why don't you pass it around? You know very well

that it 's not polite to have something that nobody else has."

"Do you mean that none of us has ideas?" the doctor demanded with a laugh.

"Oh, no! Only that nobody could possibly have an idea like Tom's."

"How do you know what it is?" Tom demanded.

"I know the kind you generally get. Fire away, Tommy! Don't you see every one watching you and holding his breath in suspense?"

"When I was in North Rutland this afternoon, I saw a wagon all fixed for a hay ride," Tom continued. "It was going toward one of the boarding-houses. Now why can't we get one up for some evening next week? We have a full moon then."

"Hurray!" Lefty cried. "We'll invite Mrs. Spencer and the girls and Cjax—"

"And we 'll get some horns and wake up the neighborhood," Jack added.

"And sing 'Aunt Dinah's Quilting Party' and all the other songs we know," Bert suggested.

"Why, you seem to like my idea, after all," laughed Tom.

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"Sure thing! It 'll be swell!" the others assured him.

The suggestion was received with such hearty enthusiasm that plans were fully matured before another sun had set. A hay rigging was hired, together with a strong team and a careful driver. Invitations were extended to Mrs. Spencer and the girls and a prompt acceptance was given. Stover and Rutledge agreed to assist Mrs. Spencer as additional chaperons. A town distant about five miles from North Rutland was chosen as a destination, because it furnished opportunities for refreshment and for several varieties of harmless amusement. Horns were purchased and all arrangements perfected for a start in the early evening of the day appointed.

When the hour of departure arrived, the campers left the bungalow and walked out to the main highway where the wagon was to call for them. Stover and Rutledge already had appeared, so they all perched on a fence near by to await the coming of the chariot.

"It's going to be a fine night," Stover remarked thankfully. "I'm glad of that, although we're so bright naturally that I sup-

pose we could have managed without the moon-light."

"I see that Tad has brought his mandolin," Rutledge added. "Now we shall have some music on the ride."

"Such as it is," Lefty murmured, and Tad promptly pushed him off the fence.

"We have a lot of horns in the crowd, too," Lefty announced from the ground. "Oh, this is a musical crowd, all right!"

"Here comes the chariot!" Tom cried, as the rattle of a springless wagon-frame sounded farther up the road, and soon they were climbing aboard and arranging themselves as comfortably as possible on the fresh, clean hay.

They drove slowly up to Mrs. Spencer's cottage, where the ladies were waiting for them. Then the party was complete, and the ride began—officially.

"The children have been very good, Mrs. Spencer," Stover assured the chaperon. "I watched them very carefully all the way. Of course, they were noisy, but that's to be expected of the little dears when they have an outing. Bless their hearts!"

Mrs. Spencer laughed merrily. "I wonder 346

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if you will be as jolly when you are really Doctor Stover, and have a lot of sick people to think of," she ventured. "If you are, I believe I shall be tempted to send for you when I feel the need of being cheered."

"Thank you, Mrs. Spencer," he replied gratefully. "You see, brethren, already I have the patronage of one patient assured. How is that for a start?"

"Fine!" Rutledge responded with a little laugh. "It surely is fortunate for you, but quite the reverse for Mrs. Spencer. Then, too, might I suggest that it sounds very heartless and cold-blooded to hear a young doctor rejoicing over the prospect of having a patient?"

"This begins to sound like a clinic," Doctor Halsey added. "It's going to be a fine thing later for Stover to have so much fun and mischief at his command. A physician has a great deal to make him feel depressed and anxious!"

"Yes, indeed!" Mrs. Spencer agreed. "You remember what Solomon says—'A merry heart doeth good like a medicine'—and I suppose a physician and his patient both share the benefit of the cheer."

"That applies to other walks of life, too," 347

Stover declared. "A man can fight through most anything if he keeps cheerful—but let's leave our moralizing until later. Who knows a new story?"

"Did I ever tell you about the time I went hunting in Arizona?" Rutledge inquired.

"Why, I didn't know—" Stover began. Then he stopped abruptly, and added almost immediately, "Why, no, you never told me, and I don't suppose any of the others have heard about it."

"It was some years ago," Rutledge began. "We were told that Mexican swallows might be found there. You know they are quite rare. One seldom sees them in this part of the country, and they are almost never shot. In fact, there is a law against it, but in that part of the country, law is regarded less highly than in our eastern states.

"I had been staying in a small town near the boundary line between Arizona and New Mexico. It was just a little collection of houses with a ramshackle hotel at one end of the street and a livery stable at the other. It was possible to walk from the main entrance of the hotel to the livery stable in just about three

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minutes, so you can imagine the extent of the place. The hotel was named 'The Arizona Palace.'

"I had a room on the second floor that commanded a view of the heavens above through holes in the roof, and of the earth beneath through the single window at the front of my palatial apartment. The glass in the window was broken, and this furnished ventilation, each sash having been nailed to the window frame.

"The first night—but I started to tell you about the Mexican swallow. One morning, I was awakened by the proprietor just as the sun was rising. He told me that this was just the sort of day for my quest.

"A little pony, saddled and ready for use, stood before the hotel, and soon I was mounted and riding over the prairie. I kept a vigilant watch, but saw no swallows.

"It was an unusually hot morning, even for that region of high temperatures, and, after a little time, I began to look about for a shady spot in which to rest.

"After riding slowly onward for two or three miles, I saw a few trees ahead, and hur-

ried toward this shelter. As I drew near, I observed that another horseman had arrived before me. Closer inspection showed that he was a Mexican.

"I dismounted, and we exchanged greetings. The Mexican was drinking from a spring which these trees sheltered, and as I watched him, I saw a Mexican swallow."

There was just an instant of silence, then a vigorous tooting of horns and a chorus of groans.

"The West is a great region for adventures," Stover said finally, after comments upon the Mexican swallow had become less violent. "I remember hearing my great-grandfather tell of an experience he had out in Wyoming among the Indians. He was a hardy pioneer, you know, and lived in a log cabin, just as did the men you've read about in books. When he wanted a meal, he'd take his rifle and go out hunting. Before he'd been out long, he'd be pretty sure to find some game.

"Well, one day, he heard that the Indians had gone on the war-path, so he thought it would be a good plan to lay in a supply of

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food, and keep under cover until the trouble passed over.

"He started out and walked about five miles. All at once, he heard an awful yelling and saw a whole tribe of Indians closing in on him from all directions. He was completely surrounded, and no way of escape seemed to present itself. In this desperate emergency, he saw a tree just ahead of him that was growing out of the side of a great hill. We should have called it a mountain here in the East.

"Dropping his rifle, he hastily climbed up into this tree, worked his way along a branch, and swung off, landing upon one of the trails across this big hill. He ran along this path just as fast as he could, with the Indians dashing in pursuit. Suddenly, a great big bear came out of the woods, and stood right in the way, waiting for great-grandfather to come nearer.

"It was an awful moment, but life on the frontier makes men quick-witted, so he sprang aside, dashed for a rocky cliff at the edge of the hill, and leaped down.

"The back of his hunting-jacket caught on 351

a projecting piece of rock, and he managed to swing himself into a cleft in the rock, just behind him. The Indians followed him to the edge of the cliff, then they sat down, waiting for great-grandfather to show himself."

Here Stover paused.

"What happened then?" Cousin Willie asked breathlessly.

"Nothing yet," Stover replied. "The Indians still are waiting, but great-grandfather has n't shown himself."

Another blast on the horns saluted the unexpected ending of the tale, and presently some one suggested that a little music would be welcome.

Then Tad obligingly "tuned up" his mandolin, and played some of the familiar pieces that he could render from memory. The others sang a vigorous, and more or less tuneful accompaniment.

Thus they made their way slowly onward toward their destination, which was reached a little before nine o'clock. The party invaded an ice-cream parlor before many minutes had passed, and the proprietor and his assistants had a busy half-hour.

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Then they separated into several groups, agreeing to assemble promptly at ten o'clock in front of the hotel where the wagon and team were quartered.

The minutes passed swiftly. Then, from a church steeple near by, ten slow, solemn, deeptoned chimes sounded. From several directions, the boys and their companions converged upon the place of assembly.

Five minutes passed—ten—still the party was not complete. Tad and Cousin Willie were missing.

"Who knows what's become of Tad and Will?" the doctor asked, a bit anxiously. "They were due here ten minutes ago."

Just then, Tad appeared in the distance, and hurried toward them, but Cousin Willie was not in sight.

CHAPTER XIX

VISITORS AT CAMP

AD and Cousin Willie had not visited either of the two moving picture shows which the town supported. They declared that it would be more fun to see the town, so they wandered along the main street, looking into the windows of stores and enjoying the very mild confusion and thrill of metropolitan life, which contrasted so strongly with the quiet stillness of Beaver Camp.

"Do we need any supplies, Bill?" Tad asked, as they approached a hardware store.

"I don't know of anything," was the reply.

Cousin Willie was called "Bill" very generally now by all the Beaver Campers, and proud he was to be hailed by this intimate title that suggested a fraternal fellowship with these older boys whom he so ardently admired.

"There 's an auto outside the store that looks 354

like yours," Tad announced, pointing toward a touring car that stood alongside the curb in front of the hardware store.

"That's right, Tad! It certainly does!"

"Better claim it, Bill, and ride back to camp in style."

Cousin Willie laughed at the idea, and they walked over to get a closer view of the car.

"Of course, it is n't ours," he declared, "but it looks exactly the same."

"Well, that might easily be. The company does n't make just one car of a certain model, and all the others different. Most likely this car is an exact duplicate of yours."

Tad walked around to the rear of the car. "What 's the number of your license tag, Bill?" he asked.

"I don't remember the new one. I wrote the old number down in a memorandum book that I used to carry, but Papa has another tag now."

"And you have another book. It beats all how things change."

Just then, a man in a long, linen automobile coat came out of the store. Tad saw him as he turned toward the car, and the expression of amazement that spread over his face caused

Cousin Willie to turn quickly in order to learn the cause.

The man saw them at the same instant, and stopped short in bewildered astonishment, as if he doubted the evidence which his eyes revealed.

"Papa!" cried Cousin Willie, springing forward.

"Why, Willie—" gasped the astonished William Langley Ainsworth, Senior.

"They call me Bill now," the boy ventured, clinging affectionately to his father, and Mr. Ainsworth smiled contentedly as he realized what the change signified.

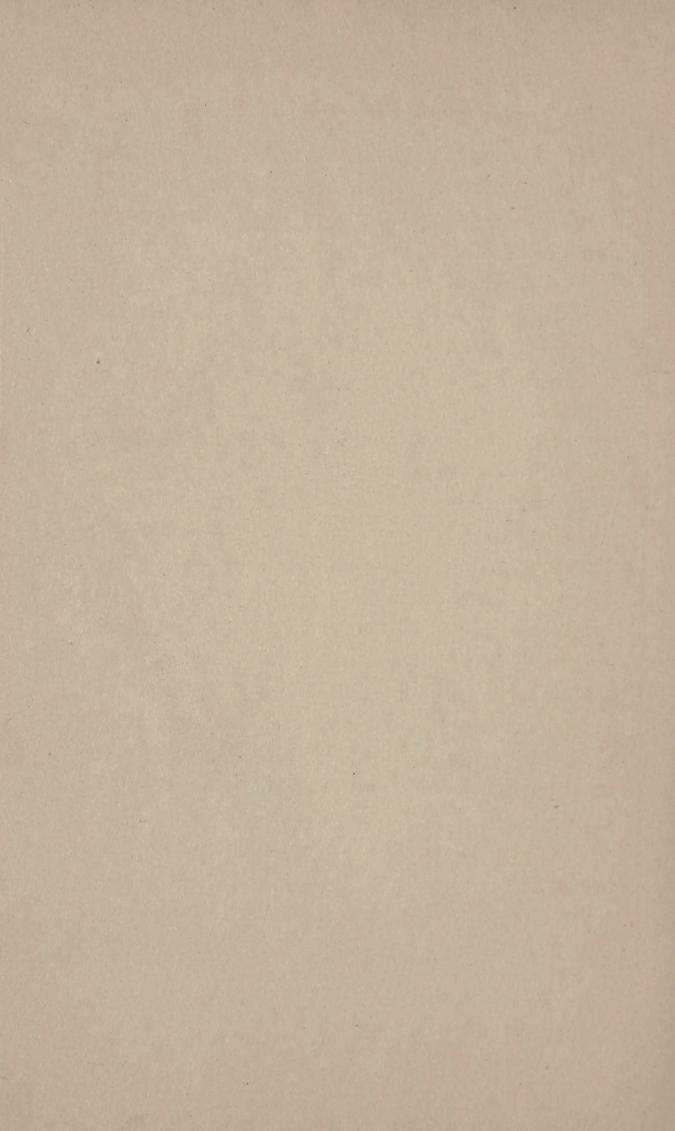
Tad managed to squeeze in his share of greeting at this point, and all three seated themselves in the automobile.

"Why, son, how you have grown!" Mr. Ainsworth exclaimed. "And how well you look! Why, I don't believe I 've ever seen you looking so well."

"I don't believe you have," the boy replied.
"I feel fine, and you ought to see how my muscles have developed. I can swim and dive and paddle and row for miles without getting tired."



The man stopped short in bewildered astonishment



Mr. Ainsworth seemed unable to take his gaze off the plump face of his son. "I declare, Will, I don't believe your mother would have recognized you. Think so, Tad?"

"I'm afraid she would n't, Uncle William, especially if he was wearing clothes that she had n't seen on him. I think now that most of the family would have to identify him by his clothes."

"Why, he 's so much larger and broader! He 's grown every way!"

"That's right, Uncle William!" Tad exclaimed heartily. "Bill has grown every way. There's just as much change inside of him as outside. He's a real boy now, through and through! He's shown a lot of grit this summer at different times, and I'm proud of him—we all are, in fact—and I don't mind saying so!" Tad concluded by laying his hand gently upon his cousin's shoulder, and the boys looked at each other with happiness and satisfaction shining out of each pair of eyes.

Mr. Ainsworth was silent a moment. Then he said:

"Ah, Tad! How much we have to thank you 359

for-you, and Tom, and the others who have been so kind to our boy."

Tad was afraid that the situation might become embarrassing, so he laughed, and replied lightly:

"You can see that it has n't worn us out, Uncle William. The fellows have been kind to Bill, I'll admit that much, but it was because they liked him and because he won the right to be treated just the same as the rest of us.

"But say—how under the sun did you get here?"

"Why, we were coming up to surprise you," Mr. Ainsworth replied, "but it has turned out to be a surprise all around. How did you happen to strike town just the same night we did?"

Then the boys told him about the hay ride, and, in the midst of the recital, Tad cried:

"Say, we were to be back at the hotel by ten o'clock. What time is it now?"

Three timepieces were produced and compared. It was just a minute or two past ten.

"I think you will have to let us keep our boy overnight, Tad," Mr. Ainsworth said. "I left his mother in our room at the hotel, resting

after our long ride, and I know she will want to see her boy."

"Of course," Tad agreed. "I'll explain to the others why Bill can't come back with us."

"You can look for us at camp to-morrow morning, Tad, if it's clear," his uncle continued. "We'll come over and return the boy to you."

"Can't you stay to dinner?" Tad responded hospitably. "We always have plenty to eat, such as it is—good plain camp fare, you know—and we 'd be real glad if you would eat a meal with us."

"Why, thank you, Tad! I'm sure we shall be very happy to accept your kind invitation."

"I'll have to run along now!" Tad exclaimed. "I'm away behind time, and the others will think I'm lost."

He sent a cordial message to his aunt, spoke a few hurried words of parting, then ran off to join the assembled party, the members of which were waiting for him with an impatience that had begun to be tinged with anxiety.

When Tad appeared, a chorus of exclamations greeted him from the campers and their guests, who were seated on the hay-rigging.

"Where 's Bill?" Lefty cried.

Tad halted and waved an arm in a gesture which he intended to appear dramatic. "Bill is in the bosom of his family," he replied mysteriously.

"What?"

"Drive along, and I'll tell you the full history of the case," Tad responded. He climbed upon the hay-rigging, and, as the horses started forward, he commenced his explanation.

"This is a dramatic tale, entitled 'The Unexpected Reunion,' or 'Why Bill Sleeps in the Hotel.'

"It was a calm, moonlight night. The stars looked down upon the quiet streets of the town. And the father, and the mother, and the child were there.

"Down the main street of the peaceful hamlet, two weary wayfarers wandered. The lights gleamed and glittered in the store windows, revealing the expression of pleasure and interest in all four of their eyes—two apiece. And the father, and the mother, and the child were there.

"Close to the curb, a large touring car was standing. The wayfarers paused. Their at-

tention was attracted. Ha! How familiar it looked. Somehow, it seemed to carry them back to the days of their bright and sunny youth when they had traveled in such a car. The door of a store near by suddenly opened (here 's where it gets really thrilling), and the father, and the mother, and the child were there.

"A man stepped boldly forth from the store and approached the touring car which still stood by the curb. With a glad cry of surprise and joy, one of the wayfarers sprang forward. The man clasped him in his arms.

"' 'Me chi-i-ild!' he cried.

"And the father, and the mother, and the child were there.

"In other words, Bill ran into his father back there in town, and my uncle carried him off to the hotel to spend the night. They 're coming out to-morrow morning to visit us at camp, and they 'll stay to dinner."

"Hurray!" cried the irrepressible Lefty. "Visitors at camp! That means an extra good feed."

"Well, of all things!" Tom gasped in surprise. "I did n't think they were within a hundred miles of camp."

Then Tad had to explain how Mr. Ainsworth had found it possible to leave the city sooner than he had anticipated, and had determined to call at Beaver Camp with his wife, in order to surprise Cousin Willie.

"I knew that they expected to visit us at camp before the season ended," Doctor Halsey acknowledged. "That was the reason I suggested postponing our trip to the northern end of the lake and to Ausable Chasm. Mr. and Mrs. Ainsworth expect to extend their travels in that direction, and I thought it would be much pleasanter if we all went together."

"It would!" Lefty promptly declared. "Are we all going in the auto?"

"Hardly!" the doctor responded with a laugh. "We'll go by boat up to Port Kent, then by train to Ausable Chasm, returning in the afternoon. It's only a one-day trip."

"We might hire that launch we used for our historical pilgrimage," Tom suggested. "We can use it all day for five dollars. Then we can start when we want to, and come back when we feel like it. We won't have to bother with time-tables, or go tearing along to catch a boat."

"That 's a good idea," Eliot remarked approvingly. "It 'll be cheaper, too, because the cost to each of us will be less than if we went on the regular boat."

"You can't judge the length of a railroad by the length of its name," Mrs. Spencer observed. "For instance, the little line that connects Ausable Chasm with the lake is called The Keeseville, Ausable Chasm, and Lake Champlain Railroad. It has a total trackage of about seven miles."

"Judging by the name, you 'd suppose it extended half-way around the equator," Lefty suggested. "It is n't safe to judge by names, though. Our washlady's name is White, and she's pretty nearly as black as ink."

"Yes, and we know a fellow in school whose name is Brown, and he 's as green as grass," Stover remarked with a reminiscent chuckle.

"We 're nearly home now," Jack reminded them. "Let 's serenade the moon."

And the hay-ride reached a noisy and happy conclusion.

The Beaver Campers were astir early the next morning, in spite of their natural inclination to linger on their comfortable cots for

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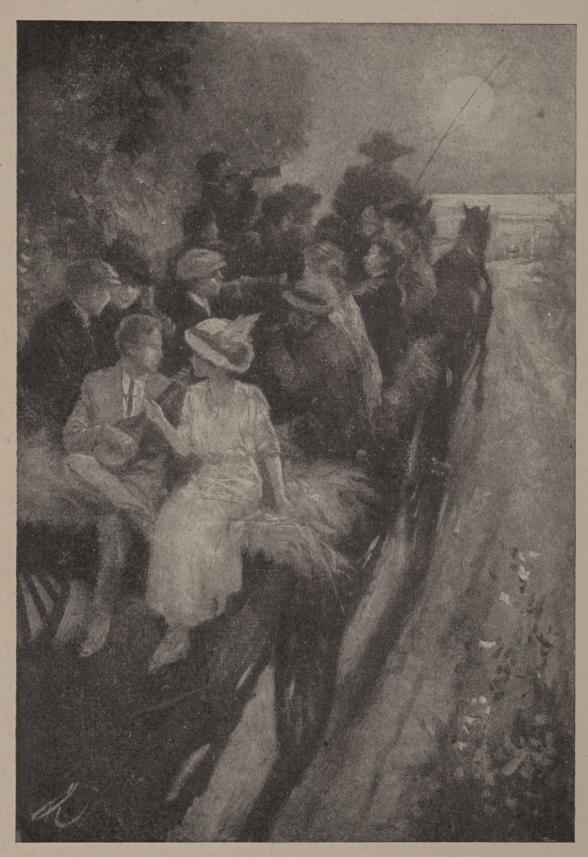
an extra period of rest after the excitement and late hours of the night previous.

They were anxious to have everything in first-class order, so that the visitors might receive a favorable impression of Beaver Camp, as well as of the housekeeping skill of the campers.

About ten o'clock, the Ainsworths arrived in the big touring car. Cousin Willie proudly introduced his parents to the several campers, including Stover and Rutledge, who had "just dropped in to see what they were going to have for dinner."

The guests of Beaver Camp seemed delighted with everything. The views were superb (fortunately, the sun was shining, and all Nature seemed at its best). The bungalow was just an ideal summer home. The simple furnishings showed praiseworthy ingenuity, and, in fact, their tour of inspection taxed their combined supply of superlatives.

Presently, they walked down to the beach, and looked out over the lake. Then Cousin Willie invited them to step into one of the camp boats, and he rowed them along shore, as far as Mrs. Spencer's landing and back again,



The moonlight hay-ride of the Beaver Campers



much to their surprise and his own immense satisfaction.

When the trio returned to Beaver Camp, dinner was almost ready. The table had been moved out under the trees, and was prettily decorated with wild flowers and ferns. Some one had suggested borrowing a tablecloth from Mrs. Spencer, but Tad declared that half the charm of the meal would be lost if they adopted any of the habits of life in the city.

It is doubtful if either Mr. or Mrs. Ainsworth ever had eaten a meal in more primitive style. They sat upon a bench at the end of a table made of boards and packing boxes. They ate from enameled ware dishes and drank from cups of the same plebeian material, but their pleasure was quite apparent, and its spontaneous enthusiasm was too real to be doubted.

The camp cooks had united their powers in an effort to produce a dinner which should be worthy of Beaver Camp. There was vegetable soup, fish taken from the waters near by, roast beef, and two kinds of vegetables, with ice cream and cake for dessert, and coffee as the final course.

They lingered long over the coffee, chatting 369

in friendly fashion of many matters, and telling stories of the busy, happy weeks that had passed during the vacation season.

After a time, they heard the sound of wheels on the camp road, and presently a buggy appeared. It stopped near the bungalow, and a man stepped down and came toward them. None of the boys recognized him at first. Then Tom said:

"Oh! Why, it 's Mr. Raymond, the man who owns Beaver Camp."

"So it is," his brother agreed. "I wonder if he is going to dispossess us."

CHAPTER XX

THE NEW OWNER OF BEAVER CAMP

MR. AINSWORTH quietly excused himself, and rose from the table.

"I think Mr. Raymond is looking for me," he said. "We are interested in some property in this section, and I arranged to meet him here this afternoon."

The two men walked back to the buggy, engaged meanwhile in earnest conversation. This continued for a short time, then Mr. Raymond drove off, and the party about the dinner-table separated.

The Ainsworths declined an invitation to remain to supper, but promised to return in the evening in order that they might enjoy a real camp-fire with the boys. Then they left Beaver Camp with many hearty expressions of their enjoyment of the hospitality extended by the campers.

In spite of the elaborate repast at mid-day, 371

the boys were ready to eat a substantial supper, and they had to work quickly afterward, in order to get things cleared away and all preparations made for a big camp-fire.

Mr. and Mrs. Ainsworth arrived just as the doctor was touching a match to the kindlings. Stover and Rutledge joined the company, too, a little later, so the group within the ruddy circle was larger than usual.

They discussed plans for the proposed trip to Ausable Chasm, and made final arrangements for this event which would mark the end of their long vacation. After this, there would be only a few days left for packing and making necessary preparations for the return to the city.

Mr. and Mrs. Ainsworth invited the Beaver Campers, including Stover and Rutledge and the Spencers, to take dinner with them at the hotel which overlooks the Chasm, and the boys secretly rejoiced over the prospect of what Lefty termed "swell eats."

At ten o'clock, the Ainsworths returned to town, declaring that they did not propose to keep the boys up late on two successive nights.

Soon all was quiet within the confines of

NEW OWNER OF BEAVER CAMP

Beaver Camp, except for a chorus of sounds proceeding from the cots on the piazza of the bungalow. These suggested a village of sawmills in active operation.

Doctor Halsey and the Ainsworths called upon Mrs. Spencer and the girls on the day following, and invited them to pilot the party through Ausable Chasm, and to share the fellowship of the dinner-party. Of course, they were happy to accept the invitation so heartily given, and now there remained only the uncertainty of the weather to menace the complete enjoyment of the trip.

Fortunately, the elements were kind, and the day chosen for the outing dawned clear and bright, with every prospect of remaining so for an indefinite period.

It was a merry party that left the landing at Beaver Camp about nine o'clock. The little Rainbow was crowded to its utmost capacity, and it was almost a miracle that some of the boys did not slip into the water from the positions in which they were precariously perched. All landed safely at Port Kent, however, in time to connect with a morning train for Ausable Chasm. Mrs. Spencer and the

girls had visited this marvelous specimen of Nature's handiwork on a number of former occasions, so they acted as guides, and piloted the party through this wonderful chasm of the Ausable River, from Rainbow Falls to Table Rock, where they embarked in boats to "shoot the rapids."

By the time they had passed through the chasm, they were quite ready for the dinner which was waiting for them at the hotel. It was more elaborate, of course, than that furnished by Beaver Camp a few days previous and it was served in better style, too, but perhaps it was not a bit more enjoyable, after all.

After the last course had been served, Mr. Ainsworth rose and said:

"While we all are here together, I have an announcement to make which I think will interest you.

"For some years, Mrs. Ainsworth and I have been promising ourselves that we would have a home in the country where we might spend a long vacation each year. We have looked at several places, but only recently have found the spot which seemed to fit into the pic-

NEW OWNER OF BEAVER CAMP

ture which our combined imaginations had painted.

"Will's letters concerning this beautiful region have been so enthusiastic that we felt inclined to investigate it carefully with the idea of buying a place somewhere in this locality.

"We have been charmed with the beauty of the scenery, and with the other attractive features which are so well known to you that I need not take time to enumerate them. Fortunately, we have discovered a place for sale that just suits us. It has long been the property of Mr. Raymond, and, this summer, has been known as Beaver Camp.

"It is not our idea to live alone—not by any means! Will would be restless and unhappy, and we should feel a bit lonesome ourselves. We shall expect to see the Beaver Campers year after year, as long as they find it possible to come, and it may be that they will feel disposed to seek others who need this kind of life as our boy did.

"We hope they will. Mrs. Ainsworth and I would feel very deeply pleased if we could know that we had a share in building up some boy as our boy has been built up during the

weeks past—not only in physical strength, but in all that makes for manhood of the finest type.

"So Beaver Camp is going right on, and Mrs. Ainsworth and I expect to be Beaver Campers next year."

Then there was a vigorous demonstration of delight, and a buzz of excited conversation. After a few moments, Tad rose and lifted a glass of water:

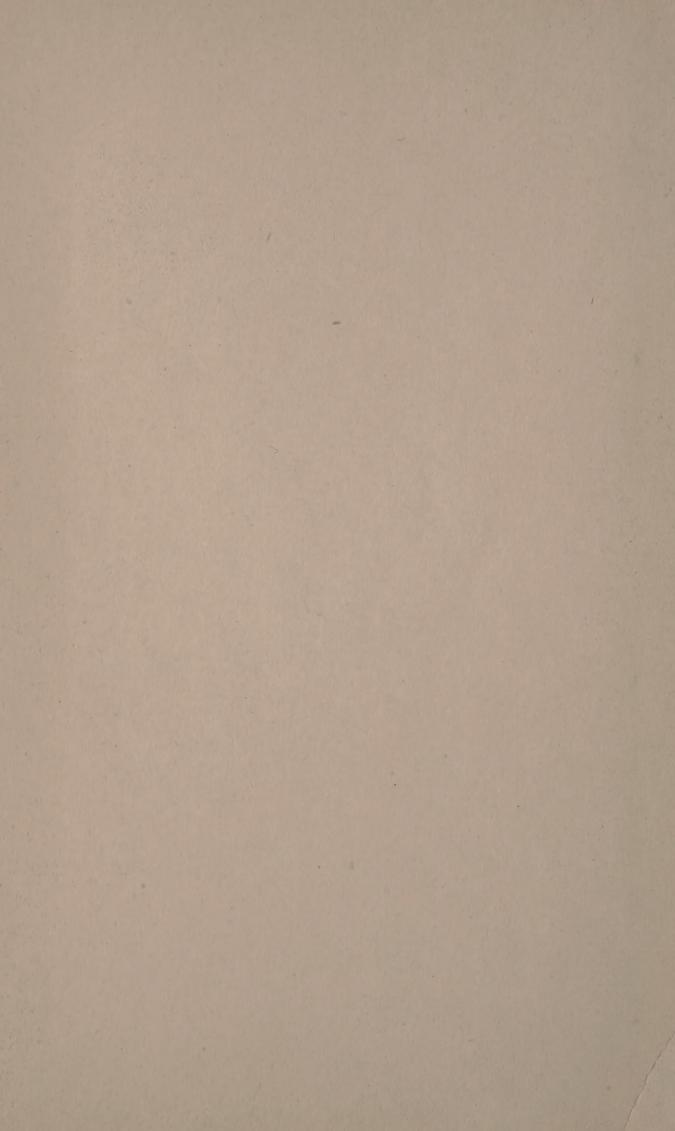
"Here's to Cousin Willie," he said, "who, in one season, has been transformed into Bill. May we always have as good results during the years ahead."

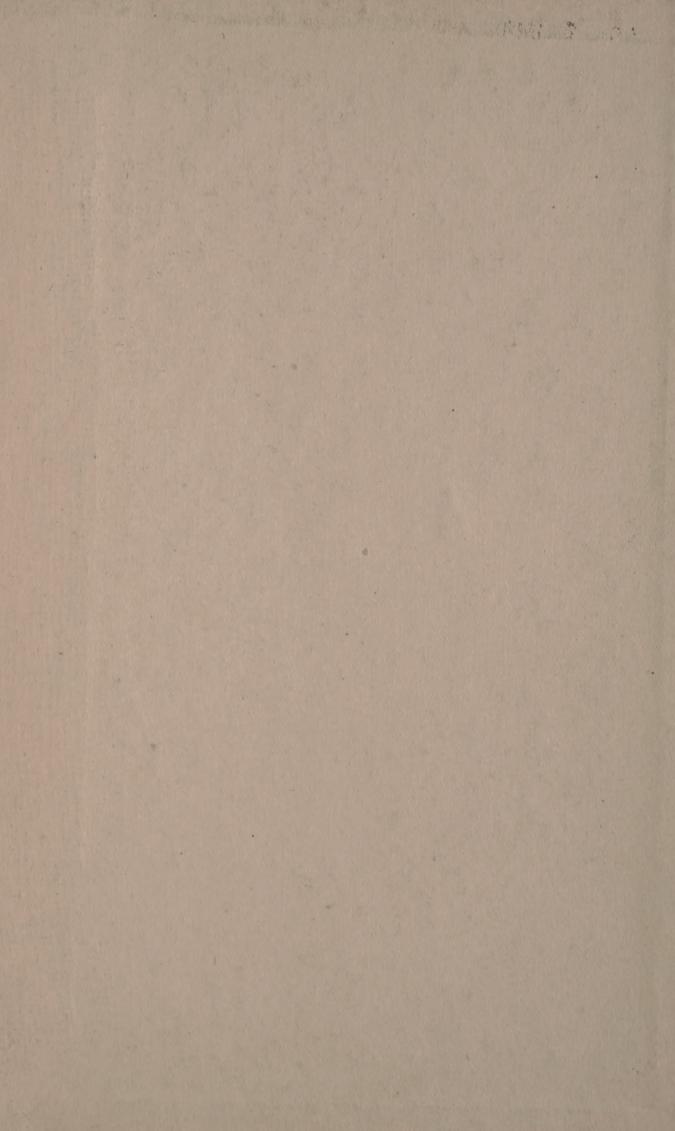
And the others, springing to their feet, enthusiastically endorsed this sentiment.

THE END











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